

were exceptional even for a humanist, let alone a theologian. Where the Roman church was traditionally suspicious of it, Luther enthusiastically embraced music as perhaps his most powerful ally in winning souls for God. He gave his musical philosophy its fullest expression in prefaces to the numerous publications that, in the early years of the Reformation, supplied music for use in the Lutheran churches and schools. The most extended and passionate of these is the preface to *Symphoniae jucundae* (1538), a collection of Latin motets issued by the reformer's close friend, the Wittenberg printer Georg Rhaw. A large proportion of the pieces contained in this anthology was the work of pre- and non-Lutheran musicians like Isaac, Mouton, Févin, and, of course, Luther's beloved Josquin (see the preceding selection). That Luther valued their music so highly shows that his love for it was not sectarian, but rather the love of a devotee and amateur practitioner of the art (Luther played the lute and the flute and even composed a few pieces that have survived). When he describes "figural music" towards the end of this essay, Luther has a very specific kind in mind. When he speaks of a simple melody in one voice, with the others "tripping lustily" about it, he is describing the so-called *Tenorlied*, the German part-song of the time, which had provided the model for the earliest Lutheran hymn settings.

Martin Luther to the Devotees of Music: Greetings in Christ! I would certainly like to praise music with all my heart as the excellent gift of God which it is and to commend it to everyone. But I am so overwhelmed by the diversity and magnitude of its virtue and benefits that I can find neither beginning nor end nor method for my discourse. As much as I want to commend it, my praise is bound to be wanting and inadequate. For who can comprehend it all? And even if you wanted to encompass all of it, you would appear to have grasped nothing at all. First then, looking at music itself, you will find that from the beginning of the world it has been instilled and implanted in all creatures, individually and collectively. For nothing is without sound or harmony. Even the air, which of itself is invisible and imperceptible to all our senses, and which, since it lacks both voice and speech, is the least musical of all things, becomes sonorous, audible, and comprehensible when it is set in motion. Wondrous mysteries are here suggested by the Spirit, but this is not the place to dwell upon them. Music is still more wonderful in living things, especially birds, so that David, most musical of all kings and minstrel of God, in deepest wonder and spiritual exultation praised the astounding art and ease of the song of birds when he said in Psalm 104, "By them the birds of the heaven have their habitation; they sing among the branches."

And yet, compared to the human voice, all this hardly deserves the name of music, so abundant and incomprehensible is here the munificence and wisdom of our most gracious Creator. Philosophers have labored to explain the marvelous instrument of the human voice: how in the air projected by a light movement of the tongue and an even further movement of the throat produce such an infinite variety and artic-

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taste with wonder (yet not to comprehend) God's absolute and perfect wisdom in his wondrous work of music. Here it is most remarkable that one single voice continues to sing the tenor, while at the same time many other voices trip lustily around it, exulting and adorning it in exuberant strains and, as it were, leading it forth in a divine dance, so that those who are the least bit moved know nothing more amazing in the world. But any who remain unaffected are clodhoppers indeed and are fit to hear only the words of dung-poets and the music of pigs.

But the subject is much too great for me briefly to describe all its benefits. And you, my young friends, let this noble, wholesome, and cheerful creation of God be commended to you. By it you may escape shameful desires and bad company. At the same time you may by this creation accustom yourselves to recognize and praise the Creator. Take special care to shun perverted minds who prostitute this lovely gift of nature and of art with their erotic rantings; and be quite assured that none but the devil goads them on to defy their very nature which would and should praise God its Maker with this gift, so that these bastards perjoin the gift of God and use it to worship the foe of God, the enemy of nature and of this lovely art. Farewell in the Lord.

Martin Luther, *Preface to Symphonie iucundae* [1538], trans. Ulrich S. Leopold, in *Luther's Works*, LIII (Philadelphia: The Fortress Press, 1965), 321-24. Used by permission of Fortress Press.

As to the reformer's reforms, they were meant to make church ritual generally, and church music particularly, a participatory, active experience, in keeping with Luther's vision of the church as the community of all believers. Therefore, functions that had traditionally been the province of the monastic or professional choir were now to be shared by the entire congregation. Thus was born the unaccompanied congregational hymn known as the Lutheran chorale, sung in unison and in the vernacular. The passage given below is from a liturgical prescription that Luther wrote in 1523.

I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during Mass, immediately after the Gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating the Host? The bishops may have these congregational hymns sung either after the Latin chants, or use the Latin on one Sunday and the vernacular on the next, until the time comes that the whole Mass is sung in the vernacular. But poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them, worthy to be used in the church of God. In the meantime, one may sing after communion, "Let God be blest, be praised, and thanked, Who to us himself hath granted." Another good hymn is "Now Let Us Pray to the Holy Ghost" and also "A Child So worthy." For few are found that are written in a proper devotional style.

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I mention this to encourage any German poets to compose evangelical

hymns for us.

This is enough for now about the Mass and communion. What is left

can be decided by actual practice, as long as the Word of God is diligently and faithfully preached in the church. And if any should ask that all these forms be proved from Scriptures and the example of the Fathers, they do not disturb us; for as we have said above, liberty must prevail in these matters and Christian consciences not be bound by laws and ordinances. That is why the Scriptures prescribe nothing in these matters, but allow freedom for the Spirit to act according to his own understanding as the respective place, time, and persons may require it. And as for the example of the Fathers, their liturgical orders are partly unknown, partly so much at variance with each other that nothing definite can be established about them, evidently because they themselves used their liberty. And even if they were perfectly definite and clear, they still could not impose on us a law or the obligation to follow them.

Martin Luther, "Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," trans. Paul Zeller Stodach, *ibid.*, 36-37. Used by permission of Fortress Press.

A memoir by Johann Waltherr (1496-1570), Luther's chief musical assistant, shows the reformer himself at work on the task set forth in the foregoing selection. His account was published in 1615 by a Lutheran musician of a later generation, Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), in his three-volume musical encyclopedia *Synagoga musica*.

Martin Luther, that holy man of God and the prophet and apostle of the German nation, took great pleasure both in plain-song and in polyphonic music. I spent many an hour singing with him and saw how happy and joyful he was then. He could never get enough of music, and he spoke about it magnificently. Forty years ago, when he was arranging the German Mass at Wittenberg, he wrote to the Elector of Saxony and to Count Johansen of beloved memory, asking to have Conrad Rupp [another early Lutheran musician] and me sent to him there. We talked to him at length about church music and the nature of the eight modes. At length he assigned the eighth mode to the Epistle, and the sixth to the Gospel, saying: "Christ is a most amiable Lord, his words are sweet; let us, therefore, use the sixth mode for the Gospel, St. Paul, on the other hand, is a grave and serious apostle; let us use the eighth mode for the Epistle." He himself, moreover, set the notes to the Epistles, the Gospels, and the sacrament of the true body and blood of Christ. He sang them all for me, and asked me for my comments. He kept me at Wittenberg for three weeks, while I set down in proper notation the music for some of the Gospels and Epistles, until the German Mass was sung for the first time in the parish church. I had to stay and hear it, and then take a copy with me to Torgau and, at Luther's request, hand it over to the Elector.

He also had me set the Vesper hymns, which were quite popular at the time, to short, simple melodies for students and children. He wanted poor students, such as beg for their bread from door to door, to have Latin songs, antiphons and responses, to sing when they had the opportunity. He was not at all pleased at their having nothing to sing but German songs. And let me say here that I do not at all approve of people who want to drive sacred music in Latin entirely out of the church, thinking it not really Evangelical or properly Lutheran. Nor do I think any better of singing nothing but Latin music in church, since in that case the congregation understands nothing. The simple, old Lutheran songs and psalms in German are best for most people; those in Latin, however, are also useful for the benefit of students and scholars.

It is clear, I think, that the Holy Spirit was at work not only with the authors of the Latin chant, but with Luther as well, who wrote most of the German hymns, and set [some of] them to music. Take for example the German Sanctus, *Jesaja dem Propheten das geschah* ["It happened unto Isajah the Prophet"]. Luther set the notes to the text, with the correct accentuation and prosody throughout—a masterful accomplishment. I was curious, and asked him where he had learned how to do it. He laughed at my simplicity, and said: "The poet Vergil taught me. He was able to fit his meter and diction to the story he was telling. Just so should music fit its notes and melodies to the text."

Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*, I (Wolfenbüttel, 1615), 451-53. Trans. for this book by Lawrence Rosenwald.

One of the ways in which the Lutheran church met the problem of quickly acquiring a musical repertoire of its own was to take existing songs, often secular ones, and adapt the words to devotional use. This method, known as parody, had its detractors, who held that the inclusion of familiar popular songs in the religious service could only demean it. Luther, on the other hand, saw in their very popularity an asset to the chorales' acceptance and potency. According to what is undoubtedly his most oft-quoted remark concerning music, Luther could not see why the devil should have all the best tunes. Here is a typical sacred parody, in which a popular song famous in a setting by Heinrich Isaac is converted to Lutheran use.

Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen, Ich fahr dahin mein' Strassen
 Mein' Freud' ist mir genomm- In fremde Land dahin.
 men, Die ich nit weiss bekunnen,
 Wo ich im Elend bin. Where I am made to suffer so.
 I don't know how I'll regain it
 My way takes me far from here,
 From here to distant lands.
 My joy is taken from me,
 thee,
 Innsbruck, I now must leave

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