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Editorial: Facing the music of medieval England

The work of medievalists has been radically changed by the development of new technologies. Today, like never before, scholars are able to access digital images of the most obscure sources via DIAMM and other repositories, share ideas and work-in-progress through social media, and benefit from the opportunity to attend specialist symposia via video conferencing. The medieval world may be historically distant, but its source materials become ever more accessible, making the discipline increasingly inviting to new researchers.

The group of articles published here were stimulated by a conference held at the University of Huddersfield, at an event that aimed to encourage scholars to make full use of the increased availability of sources of medieval English music to confront it head on. In addition, the contributors drew their methods from complementary areas such as source studies and palaeography to explore questions of manuscript provenance, historical context, and matters of performance. The conference embraced many of the technologies already mentioned, making wide use of the various online repertories of medieval sources. Speakers and delegates used ‘digital conference packs’ (offline, conference iPads) to explore sources, scores, data, or relevant secondary materials during the sessions or at their own leisure. The programme featured papers given by scholars on the other side of the world via video conferencing software.

The contributions in this volume represent something of the conference’s variety, and cover music from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. The collection opens with a revised version of the keynote lecture given by Margaret Bent, whose own research and publications have, in many ways, shaped the discipline: from her examination of the Old Hall manuscript and dozens of other early sources, to

considerations of theory, editorial practice, and historically informed performance. Typically generous here is the way in which she highlights not only some of the important work being done by scholars internationally, but also the most pressing avenues for future investigation. Top of Bent's agenda is the creation of a full and searchable prosopography of English musicians before 1600, a resource that would allow us to know precisely who was working in careers understood to be primarily musical, how musicians might have been trained, how they may have moved between institutions, and how these musicians may have interacted with institutions and patrons. This call has already begun to be addressed (notably Helen Deeming, Lisa Colton, Roger Bowers, James Cook, and Ralph Corrigan). It is hoped that the present volume will help to set a broader agenda for the forthcoming decades.

Helen Deeming and Samantha Blickhan's co-written article demonstrates the value of examining variants between sources of similar pieces of music, here focusing on two thirteenth-century English songs that reappear with new lyrics in the Dublin Troper. A case-study approach is also taken by Colton, who analyses the musical and textual elements of the fourteenth-century St Edmund motet, *Ave miles celestis curie*. Both pieces show the merits of developing detailed analytical strategies for this music. The third article in this issue, by Cook, considers how composers balance the competing demands of texture, function, counterpoint, and idiosyncratic style when approaching polyphonic composition. In focusing on the Mass cycle as cultivated in England around the mid-fifteenth century, it provides a new typology of textures, offering fresh insight into areas such as authorship, provenance, and chronology. Finally, Andrew Kirkman and Philip Weller's approach brings together joint foci on music and image – the evanescent and the immutable – with a particular focus on alabaster relief. Their contribution points the way forward for a new project

undertaken between the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham which hopes to highlight the important overlaps in use and cultural context between medieval English music and alabaster sculpture.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Centre for the Study of Music, Gender and Identity (University of Huddersfield), the British Academy series *Early English Church Music*, the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society, and the Royal Musical Association for supporting and financing the original conference.