

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Village Noise and Brueghel's Parables

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1xb6m6zc>

ISBN

978-0815334217

Author

Minamino, Hiroyuki

Publication Date

2002-04-03

Peer reviewed

Village Noise and Bruegel's Parables

Hiroyuki Minamino

Life in a medieval village brings familiarity with many sounds and noises. The wind breezes gently in summer but whistles in winter. The rain drops softly in spring but pours in fall. A clap of thunder suddenly invites a storm, and the sun comes out warmly as if nothing has happened. The leaves rustle and dance down to the ground. The brook murmurs, and the snow falls silently. A lone wolf howls in the night, the cocks crow at dawn, and the birds chirp in the morning. The water mill turns slowly and steadily. The boat's rudder chops the water, and the waves lap against the shore. On a distant hill, a shepherd blows his horn to herd his flocks that dangle jingling bells around their necks. The woodcutter cuts a tree, making echoes all over the forest. The hunter's arrow whizzes toward a leaping hare. Men plow the field with lumbering oxen. The lunch crowd joyously gathers under a tree after the morning's hard work. Women drop a bucket into a well, talking and laughing. Children play clamorously, blowing handmade pipes and beating clappers. The dog barks at a meowing cat. A hay wagon rattles on the stony road. A man rushes through the village on a neighing horse. The ice skaters make merry noises on the frozen lake. And the church bells toll, joyously, sadly, alarmingly, or proudly. On some days, the villagers hear unfamiliar sounds that draw their attention and seduce them to stop whatever they are doing. The new sounds come from the outsiders. They travel from town to town, village to village, bringing merchandise, news, entertainment, disease, and trouble.

Sing, Dance, and Be Merry

Wars, famines, and storms are some of the disasters and calamities, either natural or man-made, which befell villages in medieval times. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals were some of the everyday events of village life. Each villager went through the cycle of life, constantly accompanied by music.

Perhaps the merriest events in a villager's life in which music played a central role were weddings. Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting known as *The Bridal Procession* depicts such an occasion.¹ The title procession takes place in a hamlet on a nice sunny day. The bride is flanked by two men, perhaps her father and brother, followed by some women, perhaps her mother and sisters, and finally by other relatives and neighbors. The procession may have started from one of the three houses at the righthand corner, and now the group is passing in front of a windmill, heading toward a church with a tall bell tower. They will attend a service with an invocation, a sermon, singing, and organ-playing. The focus of this painting is no doubt the bride. But a musician also takes a prominent place. He leads the procession, walking in front of the bride, as if to scare evil spirits away from this happy occasion by the raucous sound of his bagpipe.

Once the wedding ceremony is over, it is time for a feast. A barn is now a makeshift banquet hall, and a strong smell of the hay on the floor gives the peasants satisfaction for their good harvest. People gather around a long table, merrily talking to their neighbors with animated gestures. The bride sits quietly at the center, flanked by her female relatives along with a man of importance in front of a green cloth with a hanging crown, as the uninvited villagers look on through the open doorway. Food and wine are served to the eager guests, who are seated on rough-hewn benches. Bowls of pudding are brought around on a door taken off its hinges, and wine is served in small jugs. Musicians are often at the center of this commotion. Bruegel's painting known as *Peasant Wedding* depicts such a scene.² Although the wedding banquet is a good excuse to be carefree, the painting includes a moral message. Bruegel has clearly warned against the deadly sin of Gluttony, symbolically depicted in the guise of a musician. The bagpiper in red jacket forgets his function as the provider of entertainment, instead looking longingly and with parted lips at the servers and greedy eaters, as if wishing the food would go into his empty stomach.

Any celebration invites merrymaking, and dancing is a favorite of the peasants. Many sorts of dancing cost nothing. It can be warming, joyous, and gives an opportunity to get physically closer to members of the opposite sex. Such dancing is the model for Bruegel's painting known as *Peasant Dance*.³ The feast is held outside for a celebration of a saint's birthday. People eat, drink, talk, sing, dance, and make love, ignoring the church in the background and the image of the Virgin and Child hanging to the tree. A

man in a bulging red codpiece dances with a woman. The old man with a spoon in his hat drags a woman to join the dancing, and two children dance as the adults do. One couple is kissing in public. Another couple sits at the table and mimes the action behind them. The woman at the door invites a man to come inside. A fool stands next to a man who frowns and raises his arm as if to proclaim a victory. The painting warns against Lust, and dancing is a part of this sin. Dancing cannot be done without music. Indeed, there is a bagpiper at the center of the painting. An ambitious youth with a stylishly cocked hat and peacock's feather offers wine to persuade the musician to teach him how to play the bagpipe. But the music played by Bruegel's gluttonous bagpiper is not unambiguous. Bruegel depicts music as an instrument that helps seduce innocents and not-so-innocents to satisfy the lust of the flesh.

Once the merrymaking is over, the entertainer is no longer wanted. He goes back to his daily routine of begging for alms. But the situation may not be favorable. The villagers' generosity wanes after the good time, and they may even turn hostile toward such an unwelcome guest. An engraving made after Bruegel, called *The Fat Kitchen*, depicts such a scene.⁴ The less-than-benevolent cooks shove and kick an impoverished bagpiper out from the well-stocked kitchen of an inn. Even their faithful dog assists its masters by biting his rival's skinny, bare leg.

The Parable of the Blind

Pieter Bruegel's painting known as *The Parable of the Blind* depicts six blind men who link themselves together by tugging with sticks or with their hands on the shoulder of the person ahead.⁵ As the leader of the group tumbles backward into the swamp, the second man spills onto his lap. The third man is jerked closer to these two, and the rest will also go over the brink. Bruegel's inspiration for this painting comes from a story in the Bible. When seeing his disciples agitated by those who criticize them, Jesus explained thus: "Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew, 15:14). This is not to disdain the deprivation of sight but to condemn the spiritual blindness that robs a person of salvation and eternal life. The leader of the group is a musician. Half of the instrument that he carries on his back is under water, but its shape suggests that it is a hurdy-gurdy.

As we "see" from Bruegel's blind musician, music is an auditory, not a visual, experience. This is not unlike the riddle in a musical composition from the same era. The Cathedral of Segovia now preserves a manuscript of polyphonic vocal music of the Renaissance. Most of the compositions were copied in Toledo around 1502 for use at the court of Queen Isabella of Castile, but some may have been brought to Spain when the Burgundian

duke, Philip the Fair, made a tour there in 1502.⁶ One composition is attributed to "*Fernandis et frater ejus*" (Fernandez and his brother) and has this inscription: "*Cecus non judicat de coloribus*" (The blind cannot judge color).⁷ This seems more likely to be a sort of commentary or epithet rather than the title of a piece, or the incipit of a text. The blind, of course, cannot distinguish any color. What then is the meaning of emphasizing the obvious?

It has its origin in antiquity. It appears in Aristotle's *Physics*, 2.1, which can be paraphrased as "*Caecus natus non potest disputare de coloribus quantum ad rem, sed quantum ad nomen.*"⁸ It became a commonplace expression in the Renaissance. Giovanni Spataro, for instance, used a similar phrase, "*cecus non iudicat de colore,*" in his letter of 1528 to his fellow music theorist Giovanni del Lago.⁹ Here "blind" refers to an ignoramus. It conveys the idea of the novice's incapacity to find and appreciate the subtleties that are apparent to the learned or initiated. What kind of subtleties does the Fernandez brothers' composition hide? A hint may be the "color."¹⁰

The Fernandez brothers' composition lacks any texts and appears in the section of the Segovia manuscript that seems to be devoted to a collection of compositions either composed for instruments or conceived as suitable for instrumental performance.¹¹ The instrumental character of the music may be seen in the extensive use of sequences with continuous motion, scale fragments dispersed over wide musical ranges, and stretto-like imitations. Renaissance instrumentalists customarily applied ornaments to the music they played. Virtuosi pushed the limits of adding ornaments to the vocal compositions so far that they often obscured the original composition (a practice that dismayed its composer) in order to show off their finger dexterity. The instrumentalists who followed this performance practice were called colorists. Is the inscription a mockery of the practice of instrumentalists who were "blindly" infatuated with the extravagant use of ornaments in small note values? If so, who is mocking whom? Are the Fernandez brothers mocking themselves?

This raises the question of whether it is the blind man who is to be blamed for his ignorance. The musical term "coloration" refers to the notational convention according to which the note loses one-third of its value when daubed with black, and is therefore considered imperfect.¹² In medieval and Renaissance music theory, ternary meter was considered perfect because of the significance of the number three, the Holy Trinity, while binary meter was regarded as imperfect. The mensuration in the Fernandez brothers' composition is *tempus imperfectum*, and some pitches are written in black notes. Does the deprivation of note value refer to the deprivation of sight, therefore suggesting that the Fernandez brothers were "blind"?

The Fernandez brothers' composition is not a unique source for the use of coloration, imperfect mensuration, and ornamentation, but an example

of a widely spread practice of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Why then is the inscription attached to this particular piece? If subtlety is not in the "color," where else do we see it? A clue may be the one who sees (or cannot see) the color.

The Segovia manuscript had a strong association with Philip the Fair, and the composition is attributed to "Fernandis et frater ejus." Johannes Tinctoris described his encounter with the brothers Carolus and Johannes Orbus at Bruges, an event that might have occurred between 1476 and 1480.¹³ Tinctoris expressed his admiration for their musicianship, particularly the brothers' mastery on the "*viola cum arculo*" (the four-stringed medieval fiddle).¹⁴ Tinctoris may have used the Latin word "*Orbus*" to refer to the physical characteristics of the brothers: "*Orbus*" means either blind or orphan in Latin.¹⁵ Johannes was "nearly blind," and his blindness was an inheritance. The father of Johannes and Carolus was the legendary Spanish blind instrumentalist Jehan Ferrandez (or Fernandez) who, together with his blind companion Jehan de Cordoval, was employed for many years at the court of Burgundy.¹⁶ By the time the Segovia manuscript was compiled and the inscription was attached, both Johannes and Carolus Fernandez were most likely no longer alive; Johannes died in 1496 and Carolus certainly before 1506 when Jodocus Badius Ascensis published a homage for him.¹⁷ If the deprivation of sight refers to the deprivation of life, the blind who does not see the "color" must refer to Johannes or Carolus or both. And yet, if this interpretation is correct, is it not strange that Johannes and Carolus could not find the subtleties they created in their own composition?

Much as Bruegel's blind hurdy-gurdy player tried to see his way to salvation, I tried to see the "color" in the Fernandez brothers' composition. Instead, we both fell into the ditch.

The Wandering Musician

Merchants, run-away monks, artisans, student drop-outs, minstrels, prostitutes, gypsies, and beggars are the outsiders who come to medieval villages. They are jacks-of-all-trades who hope their entertainment draws the attention of the villagers, help increase the sales of their merchandise, and provide them with better alms. They play various musical instruments, sing songs, recite tales, throw knives into the air, jump rope, balance chairs, somersault, and do walking handstands.¹⁸ Bruegel's musicians were not the kind of musicians who frequented the courts of kings and princes, but wandering minstrels who earned their living by singing popular songs and accompanying themselves on instruments.

In Medieval and Renaissance societies, occupational specialization most often arose from hereditary calling. Birth and inheritance often

determined one's occupation. Family members strove to continue their family vocation so that the skill of their trade could be passed from father to son.

We do not know whether Bruegel's blind musician followed this tradition. He may not have had any other choice. Because of their visually challenged physical condition, blind people had to select occupations that emphasized their other senses. Many blind men and women therefore turned to music as their profession. Music depends more on ears than on eyes.¹⁹ Singing and playing instruments require mouths and hands. A well-trained musician does not have to see the keyboard, fingerboard, or fingerholes when playing the instrument. He can feel the keys, frets, holes, and strings with his hands. Moreover, the blind person's sense of hearing was perhaps sharper than that of their sighted counterparts because of a greater concentration on hearing. In fact, some blind musicians became internationally renowned composers or instrumentalists.²⁰

In Bruegel's time, one or another subject of music was taught in universities, ecclesiastical institutions, courts, music-schools, academies, and by private teachers. The object of learning music and the subjects taught at these institutions differed. The student's social status and his future occupation determined the kind of education he was to receive. The university curriculum focused on music theory. Princely courts and the choir schools belonging to the major churches educated the composers and singers of polyphonic music. The master-apprenticeship system provided the training for the would-be professional instrumentalists that concerned the practical side of music making.²¹ Bruegel's beggar musician was likely to have learned music with little formal training, instead picking up the trade from a friend or two, or being self-taught, using whatever talent he possessed.

Even those who had little talent in music had no choice but to become musicians. The donkey, the hound, the cat, and the cock in the Grimm brothers' folk tale "The Bremen Town-Musicians" are good examples of such an ambitious career move. Having grown too old to do the tasks that have been entrusted to them to serve their masters, the four castoffs decide to become town-musicians in Bremen. The donkey plays the lute, the hound wants to learn the drum, the cock has a good voice, and the cat knows night-music. The four of them set out to Bremen and reach a forest where they find some robbers having a feast. The musicians perform together to drive the robbers away: the donkey brays, the hound barks, the cock crows, and the cat meows. Surprised and scared, the robbers hastily take flight. The four musicians happily satisfy their empty stomachs with what is left of the feast. They never make it to Bremen.²²

What kind of night-music did the cat know? Perhaps it was a serenade. The donkey must have been happy to assist the cat, for the elegant shape and delicate sound made the lute a suitable instrument for lovers' courting.

One Bonifazio Uberti, for instance, serenaded a lady with his song and lute accompaniment, no doubt expecting to receive her favor, platonically or carnally.²³ The donkey-lutenist did not have to know the intricacies of the finger-plucking technique that was the standard in the sixteenth century.²⁴ Strumming chords could provide exciting rhythms. In fact, serenading became so extravagant and noisy that musicians often disturbed the order of a town. The Florentine statutes of 1325, for instance, sought to regulate the practice by laying down the penalty of confiscation for instruments played at night.²⁵ No wonder serenading was considered a fool's pastime in Sebastian Brandt's *Das Narrenschiff*.²⁶

The Instrument of Seduction

Bruegel's peasants march and dance to the sound of the bagpipes. The simplest bagpipe comprises a bag, a short blowpipe, and one or more reed pipes. One pipe is called the chanter, fitted with several fingerholes that permit the player to produce different pitches. The other one, usually larger and longer, has no fingerholes, and is only capable of producing one pitch (therefore called the drone). The player holds the blowpipe in his mouth, blows air through it to inflate the bag, fingers the chanter in front of him, and squeezes the bag held under one of his arms, thus regulating the air pressure and forcing the air through the reed pipes.²⁷

The bagpipe produces raucous sound, audible even at a far distance. It is indeed the volume of sound that makes the bagpipe a suitable instrument for accompanying dancing. The noisy footsteps, singing, and shouting do not even muffle the sound of a lone bagpiper. Beggars, servants, and peasants played the bagpipe. Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, for instance, created a scene in which a servant plays the bagpipe while his masters and ladies dance to forget about the deadly plagues that were ravaging their hometown of Florence.²⁸ It was a scene from the real world. In the midst of life lurks death, and music offers momentous joy in a fleeting time.²⁹

Bruegel may have depicted his country scenes from real life, or he may have added hidden meanings.³⁰ In Renaissance iconography, musical instruments had various meanings, sometimes opposing and contradictory. They may have been depicted as symbols of love, mostly appearing in astrological drawings, because musicians of all kinds were among the "children of Venus."³¹ In Christian art, musical instruments are the allegorical representations of the passage in Psalm 150, "Laudate eum in sono tubae, laudate eum in psalterio." All kinds of instruments are depicted as means to praise God. This may be the symbolism of the bagpipe in *The Bridal Procession*, the notion strengthened by the church in the background.³² The bagpipe was, on the other hand, depicted as a favorite instrument of a Phrygian satyr Marsyas, a symbol of Bacchanalian

frivolities. Because of its shape, the bagpipe also had phallic significance, a suitable attribute in wedding scenes.

The blind musician in *The Parable of the Blind* is a hurdy-gurdy player. The hurdy-gurdy is a sort of mechanized fiddle. The performer produces sound by turning a crank at the tail of the instrument's body, which makes a wooden wheel in the middle of the sound box revolve, and consequently vibrate the strings. There are two to four stopped strings and one or two unstopped strings. The melody strings are stopped by a primitive key mechanism, a set of stopping rods, equipped with little projections that press inwardly against the strings when the rods are pushed in. The vibrating strings of the hurdy-gurdy produce a nasal sound.³³

Like the bagpipe, the hurdy-gurdy had a long history by the time Bruegel painted this image. The hurdy-gurdy first began to appear in the Gothic period and was called *organistrum* or *symphonia*. When the *organistrum* was first invented and cultivated, it was an instrument of some importance. Musicians and theorists used it as a tool to teach musical intervals because music education required students to know the fundamental of mathematics. It was also used in many cloisters and monastic schools to perform religious polyphony and provide correct intonation for singers. We do not know when the *organistrum* became an instrument of wandering musicians and beggars. By the time Bruegel depicted the hurdy-gurdy in the hands of a blind beggar, its negative connotations had been firmly established. The learned considered the hurdy-gurdy a lowly instrument. Michael Praetorius called the hurdy-gurdy "the peasants' and vagabond women's lyra," and Marin Mersenne testified that "it is played only by the poor, and especially the blind."³⁴

Bruegel's musicians are one-man bands. It is therefore fitting for them to choose the bagpipe or hurdy-gurdy, which are equipped with mechanisms to produce more than one voice. Also important is these instruments' capacity to produce loud, penetrating sound. The musicians' business cannot begin until they attract people's attention in a wide, open area. But the villagers are suspicious of the outsiders. The legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin is still fresh in their mind. A minstrel who wore a varicolored dress came to Hamelin to help drive the rats, which were plaguing the villagers, out of town. By playing music on his pipe, he successfully led the rats to the river where they drowned. When the town officials refused to pay the reward money promised for the deed, the piper became angry and planned revenge. Through the power of his music he lured the children of the town to the nearby mountain and made them disappear forever. The date was June 26, 1284.

It was the enchanting music that seduced the rats and the children. Does music have such a power? Ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle discussed how the power of music affected the human psyche, but it was the

legend of Orpheus that was especially popular in Bruegel's time. A Thracian poet, Orpheus's skill in lyre playing was such that with his music he was said to tame the wild beasts and move the trees and rocks. But his life was tragic. While fleeing from an unwelcome suitor, Orpheus's wife Eurydice trod on a snake and died from its bite. Orpheus, learning of his wife's tragic death, descended into Hades where Eurydice had gone. By the power of his music, Orpheus succeeded in persuading the god of the dead to allow Eurydice to follow him back to earth, on one condition: Orpheus should not look back at her until they reach the upper world. But, at the last moment, Orpheus could not contain himself, and Eurydice vanished forever to the underworld.³⁵

In the Renaissance, the story of Orpheus was made widely known through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It became a favorite of poets, composers, and painters, partially due to the fact that the main character was a musician-poet.³⁶ The painters depicted Orpheus in musical scenes (mythological or contemporary), and several lute and vihuela books included drawings of Orpheus playing an instrument, alluding to their association with the musician.³⁷ It was the highest honor for the musician, particularly the instrumentalist, of the Renaissance to be equated with Orpheus; among those who won this praise were Pietrobono de Burzellis, Francesco da Milano, and John Dowland.³⁸

"Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" Thus Benedick, a young Paduan lord, in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* (2.3) wonders about the magical power of music. In the Renaissance, the ancient lyre was equated with various stringed instruments of the time, but most frequently with the lute. Shakespeare may have been thinking of the Orpheus legend and superimposed the ancient lyre on contemporary lute playing. However impressed Shakespeare was by the sound of gut strings, these very intestines caused pain to the lutenists. Until the invention of nylon strings, the gut of the ram was the standard material used for lute strings. Gut strings were notoriously easy to slacken and break, the more so if the humidity was high. Some gut strings were certainly not satisfactory due to the underdeveloped technology of the time. Shakespeare's wonder at the marvelous effects created by some lutenists despite their use of vulgar material was indeed legitimate.³⁹

The Invisible Sound

Paintings and woodcuts often show beggar minstrels singing and playing musical instruments in towns and villages. We see their music making, but we do not hear their sound. Reconstructions of medieval and Renaissance instruments based on the descriptions, paintings, and a few surviving specimens give us an idea about the kind of sound the beggar minstrels' instruments produced. But we achieve this only through our imagination.

Numerous extant manuscripts and prints offer us a glimpse into the musical activities of performers and listeners of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. They show us how churches, princely courts, and wealthy amateurs patronized music and what kind of music upper-class societies favored. In Bruegel's time, musical notation belonged to a small number of highly educated professional musicians who worked at princely courts or churches, as well as to a small number of amateur dilettantes who had the financial means to afford the luxury of spending time and money to cultivate such an expensive pastime. The kind of music they favored, polyphonic music, needed notation so that several vocal or instrumental parts could be viewed simultaneously or separately and could be recorded for future performance.⁴⁰

Surviving music, however, does not give us the complete picture of music making from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. There is a lost layer of music that was not written down.⁴¹ Beggar minstrels of towns and villages did not record their music. They were ignorant of music theory and did not know any music notation. In fact, there was no need for beggar musicians to be musically literate (and Bruegel's blind musician could not have seen notation, anyway).⁴² Wandering minstrels memorized popular tunes by rote and improvised upon them or even "composed" new melodies in order to please their audience. The street songs of catchy melodies with topical, comical, satirical, or erotic lyrics may have sufficed to satisfy the appetite and taste of the townspeople and villagers. And because Bruegel's musicians lived before the age of electronically operated recording systems, there is no way of recovering the music and sound of wandering minstrels and street musicians. Is there?

The printed collections of "art music" seem to be the last place to look for the kind of music Bruegel's beggar musicians played. A sixteenth-century Nuremberg lutenist Hans Newsidler published a lute piece called *Der Bethler Tantz* in his lute book of 1540.⁴³ The word "Bethler" (or "Bettler") means "beggar." *The Beggar's Dance* is a short piece. In keeping with the custom of Newsidler's time for dance arrangements, the piece consists of two sections (Example 14.1).⁴⁴ The main section is in duple meter, followed by the section, called *Hufffauff*, in triple meter. The melody is a catchy one, and the rhythm is lively. It is tempting to imagine that *The Beggar's Dance* was quite attractive to villagers and townspeople when played and danced to it by a beggar entertainer.

What made Newsidler name this piece *The Beggar's Dance*? Was he familiar with the popular melody sung or played by beggar musicians in the streets of Nuremberg, and so impressed that he made a lute arrangement? Did Newsidler compose the entire piece based on his impression of the music of beggar musicians, therefore offering an early example of "program music"?

The image displays a musical score for two pieces: "Der Bethler tanz" and "Hupff auff". The score is written in two staves, treble and bass clef, with a common time signature (C). The first piece, "Der Bethler tanz", consists of the first four systems. The second piece, "Hupff auff", is marked with a 3/4 time signature and begins with the instruction "Hupff auff" above the first staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf*. There are first and second endings indicated by the numbers 1 and 2 above the staves.

Example 14.1. Hans Newsidler, *Ein neues Lautenbüchlein* (Nuremberg, 1540), ff. D1-D1v, "Der Bethler tanz" and "Hupff auff."

Newsidler was certainly familiar with the songs popular among the common people of Nuremberg; indeed he was one of them. He published several lute pieces called *Gassenbauer*, meaning “street (or popular) song.”⁴⁵ What makes this piece a “street song”? One of Newsidler’s *Gassenbauers*, published in his lute book of 1536, shows some unusual musical characteristics, with a melodic style not compatible with the vocabulary of sixteenth-century vocal counterpoint (see Example 14.2).⁴⁶ It is definitely instrumental in character and, in this case, plebeian. The melody lacks any significant contour; it hardly moves more than the interval of a third (the first phrase uses only two pitches). Moreover, each main note is repeated four times, giving the effect of a tremolo, a trademark of stringed instruments.⁴⁷ The alternating motion of fingers or a bow on one note is easily produced on them.

Another nonvocal style in the *Gassenbauer* is the use of the “strumming style” (Newsidler called it “*durch strachen*”). This style best applies to the situation in which all the chordal notes appear on the adjacent strings of an instrument, thereby creating pseudo-polyphony. The player plucks the strings with a plectrum, a finger or fingers, from the lowest string to the highest or vice versa.⁴⁸ This produces chords in arpeggio, either fast or slow depending on the speed of the strumming. If the chords are repeated rapidly, a drone effect and lively rhythm are created. In Newsidler’s *Gassenbauer*, the chords occur on the first and third beats, creating a bouncy triple meter.

The basic musical structure in Newsidler’s *Gassenbauer* is a combination of simple melody and chordal accompaniment. The chordal notes are added

Example 14.2. Hans Newsidler, *Ein newgeordent künstlich Lautenbüch* (Nuremberg, 1536), ff. x1–x1v, “Gassenbauer.”

to strengthen the sound on the lute. If we simplify this lute arrangement by omitting the chordal notes, the result is the combination of a melody and a single-voice bass pattern.⁴⁹ The hurdy-gurdy and bagpipes are equipped with a melody-producing device and a drone-producing device, the chanter and a drone pipe for the bagpipes and the keyboard and drone string(s) for the hurdy-gurdy. We may not be so far-fetched in imagining Bruegel's beggar minstrels playing music such as Newsidler's *Gassenbauer* on his hurdy-gurdy or bagpipes.

Time is Semibrevel Money

Hans Newsidler was a lute player, lute instructor, maker of instruments, and published several books of lute compositions and arrangements with extensive instructions on how to play the instrument and how to read tablature. He was an educated man. But his life was not much better than that of Bruegel's beggar musicians. Newsidler's struggle with his financial situation is best exemplified by his instruction on how to count time. He instructed his students that the rhythmic sign for the semibreve (the basic *tactus* in lute compositions and intabulations) should be played in the same tempo as the striking of the hour or bells on a tower, or the sound of counting money "nice and gently" while saying "one, two, three, four."⁵⁰

A miser may count money slowly. A spendthrift may count money quickly. Newsidler had to count money "nice and gently" for good reasons. He lived in a city that was struggling for its economic growth and had an occupation that offered no financial stability or prosperity. As Keith Moxey has written, during the first half of the sixteenth century "more than half the inhabitants [of Nuremberg] were artisans who lived a more or less precarious existence, continually threatened by unemployment and inflation."⁵¹ Newsidler indeed complained about his financial difficulties. He had to raise thirteen children (plus an additional four children after his second marriage). At one time Newsidler had to sell his house after his appeal to the Nuremberg city council for help failed.⁵² When he wrote the instruction on how to count time, he may have been thinking of his own purse emptying too quickly.

Gone with the Wind

Everything must end. The musicians who entertained the villagers must move on. Only those who have lands to cultivate and those who have occupations that cater to the everyday needs of the villagers remain. Wandering minstrels and beggar musicians are not allowed to stay in the same village for long. They come and go like the wind.⁵³ Once the musicians leave, only the more familiar sounds will fill the villagers' ears.

Notes

I am indebted to April Parkins and Guy Johnson for their help.

1. Brussels, Musée Communal de la Ville de Bruxelles. Reproduced in Bob Claessens and Jeanne Rousseau, *Bruegel*, reprint ed. (New York: Portland House, 1987), pl. 92. The painting is now attributed to Jan Bruegel the Elder. For a summary of the biography and works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, see Alexander Wied, "Bruegel, (1) Pieter Bruegel I," *The Dictionary of Art* (London: Macmillan; New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1996), vol. 4, 894–910; and F. Grossmann, *Pieter Bruegel Complete Edition of the Paintings* (London: Phaidon Press, 1973). Bruegel's paintings with peasant subjects are discussed in Margaret A. Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants: Art and Audience in the Northern Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Ethan Matt Kavaler, *Pieter Bruegel: Parables of Order and Enterprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 149–62, 184–200. See also Claude-Henri Rocquet, *Bruegel or the Workshop of Dreams*, translated by Nora Scott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
2. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Reproduced in Wilfried Seipel, ed., *Pieter Bruegel the Elder at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna* (Milan: Skira Editore, 1998), 131; and Claessens and Rousseau, *Bruegel*, pls. 127, 128–29 (details). Gustav Glück, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, trans. Eveline Byam Shaw (London: The Hyperion Press), 34, points out that the "guests do not exceed twenty, the number prescribed by Charles V in a proclamation as the limit for participants in country weddings such as this."
3. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Reproduced in Seipel, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, 141; and Claessens and Rousseau, *Bruegel*, pls. 125, 126 (detail).
4. Reproduced in Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art: Studies in Musical Iconology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), Plate 28b.
5. Naples, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte. Reproduced in Claessens and Rousseau, *Bruegel*, pls. 109, 110–15 (details).
6. For the manuscript, see Higiní Angles, "Un manuscrit inconnu avec polyphonie du XVe siècle conservé à la cathédrale de Ségovie," *Acta musicologica* 8 (1936): 6–17; *idem*, *La música en la corte de los reyes católicos*, Monumentos de la música española, 1 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Diego Velázquez, 1960), 106–12; Herbert Kellman, *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400–1550*, Renaissance Manuscript Studies, 1 (N.p.: American Institute of Musicology/Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hansler-Verlag, 1984), vol. 3, 137–38; and Norma Klein Baker, "An Unnumbered Manuscript of Polyphony in the Archives of the Cathedral of Segovia: Its Provenance and History" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1978).
7. Segovia Cathedral, Archivio Musical, no shelf number, ff. 195v–97. It is also attributed to Alexander Agricola in St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 462, and to Heinrich Isaac in Hradec Králové, Museum, Codex Speciálník. A modern transcription of the piece may be found in Edward R. Lerner, ed., *Alexandri Agricola: Opera Omnia*, Corpus mensuralibus musicae, 22 (N.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1970), vol. 5, 102–5.
8. The paraphrase is taken from Bonnie J. Blackburn, Edward E. Lowinsky, and Clement A. Miller, eds., *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 330, n. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, 330–34.
10. The symbolism of visibility or invisibility in a composition was presented differently in the sixteenth century. Allusion to vision was a well-known compositional technique among madrigal composers. If a text refers to eyes, for instance, the composer may present the physical feature of the eyes in musical notation. A row of two breves or semibreves on the staff may look like eyes, but the symbolism can be noticed only on paper, not by sound. On "eye-music," see Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, trans. Alexander H. Krappe, Roger H. Sessions, and Oliver Strunk, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), vol. 1, 234–44.

11. See Jon Banks, "A Piece of Fifteenth-Century Lute Music in the Segovia Codex," *The Lute: The Journal of the Lute Society* 34 (1994): 3-10; Hiroyuki Minamino, "Johannes and Carolus Fernandez, Fifteenth-Century Composers of Music for Lute," *The Lute: The Journal of the Lute Society* 37 (1997): 5-8; and Jon Banks, "Performing the Instrumental Music in the Segovia Codex," *Early Music* 27 (1999), 295-309.
12. On coloration, see Willi Apel, *The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600*, 5th and rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), 126-44.
13. Johannes Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musicae* (Naples, 1481-1483), libro quarto. For the relevant passages, see Karl Weinmann, *Johannes Tinctoris (1445-1511) und sein unbekannter Traktat "De inventione et usu musicae"*, 2nd ed. (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1961), 45; and Anthony Baines, "Fifteenth-Century Instruments in Tinctoris's *De inventione et usu musicae*," *The Galpin Society Journal* 3 (1950), 24. For the date of compilation of the treatise, see Ronald Woodley, "The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise *De inventione et usu musicae*," *Early Music History* 5 (1985): 241-45. For Tinctoris's trip north, see idem, "Johannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (1981): 235-36.
14. Johannes and Carolus Orbus worked as organists at Bruges; see Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 32, 88, 143. Tinctoris regarded the bowed "viola" as an instrument suitable for the recitation of epic poems as well as for sacred music.
15. Indeed, Tinctoris called the blind German instrumentalist Conrad Paumann "Orbus ille germanus" in the same treatise. For the identification of "Orbus ille germanus," see Hiroyuki Minamino, "Conrad Paumann and the Evolution of Solo Lute Practice in the Fifteenth Century," *Journal of Musicological Research* 6 (1986): 291-310.
16. See Paula Higgins, review of Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1989): 159, n. 20. For the biography of Cordeval and Fernandez, see Jeanne Marix, *Histoire de la musique et des musiciens de la cour de Bourgogne sous le règne de Philippe le Bon (1420-1467)*, *Sammlung musikwissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen*, vol. 29 (Baden-Baden: V. Koerner, 1974), 117-18; and Albert Van der Linden, "Les aveugles de la cour de Bourgogne," *Revue belge de musicologie* 4 (1950): 74-76. In some documents Johannes and Carolus were called "Brugensis" or "Normannus." It may not have been improper to regard them as such, if they were born after their father came to Burgundy in 1433.
17. Tinctoris praised both Carolus and Johannes not only as excellent musicians but also for their knowledge of literature. This makes it likely that Johannes is one and the same person as the "Johannes Citharoedi" or "Le Harpeur" who became a rector at the University of Paris in 1485 and retired from the chair of ethics in 1491, and that Carolus is identical with the rector who taught literature at the same university; see Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, 88. Both Johannes and Carolus are further recorded as instrumentalists to Charles VIII in 1488 and 1490; see André Pirro, "L'Enseignement de la musique aux universités françaises," *Acta musicologica* 2 (1930): 46-47.
18. One such account can be found in Edmund Bowles, "Haut and Bas: The Grouping of Musical Instruments in the Middle Ages," *Musica disciplina* 8 (1954), 116, n. 3. On medieval minstrels, see Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); John Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1989); Zoltán Falvy, *Mediterranean Culture and Troubadour Music*, *Studies in Central and Eastern European Music*, 1 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986).
19. Only exceptionally talented and strong-willed persons such as Beethoven conquer this devastating handicap for musicians.
20. Francesco Landini and Conrad Paumann to name a few.
21. This is necessarily a simplification. Some musicians crossed the lines discussed here. An Elizabethan composer and instrumentalist, John Dowland, for instance, was trained in the master-apprentice system, attained the bachelor's degree in music from

- Cambridge and Oxford, and was employed at aristocrats' households. On music education in the Renaissance, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Music and Learning in the Early Italian Renaissance," *Journal of Renaissance and Baroque Music* 1 (1947), 255-74, reprinted idem, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 142-62; Nan Cook Carpenter, *Music in the Medieval and Renaissance Universities* (Oklahoma, 1958); Nan Cook Carpenter and Iain Fenlon, "Education in Music: III. Renaissance," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan; Washington D.C.: Grove's Dictionary of Music, 1980), vol. 6, 8-12; and Hiroyuki Minamino, *Sixteenth-Century Lute Instruction* (The Lute Society in preparation).
22. The musicians in this tale could have been contemporaries of Bruegel's musicians. The hint is the lute. The lute was developed from the Arabic *'ud*, most likely in thirteenth-century Spain. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the lute was an "aristocratic" instrument, expensive to buy and to maintain. In the sixteenth century, the lute became the most popular among secular instruments. Unlike the organ or harpsichord, the lute was easy to carry, and according to one lute enthusiast's account, could be hidden in an overcoat. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the lute had more bass strings, sometimes with two peg-boxes. We should, of course, take into consideration the fact that the term "lute" (*"laute"* in German) was loosely applied and could mean any plucked stringed instrument.
 23. Bonifazio's story, told by Giovanni da Prato, is discussed in Howard Mayer Brown, "The Trecento Harp," in *Studies in the Performance of Late Medieval Music*, ed. Stanley Boorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 59. See also Albert Pomme de Mirimonde, "Le musique dans allégories de l'amour," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 68 (1966), 265-90.
 24. See Hiroyuki Minamino, "Sixteenth-Century Lute Treatises with Emphasis on Process and Techniques of Intabulation" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988).
 25. On this Florentine statute, see John Larner, *Culture and Society in Italy 1290-1420* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 172.
 26. The drawings of serenaders in *Das Narrenschiff* are reproduced and discussed in Edmund A. Bowles, *Musikleben im 15. Jahrhundert*, *Musikgeschichte in Bildern*, Band III: Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, Lfg. 8 (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1977), 106-7.
 27. William A. Cocks, Anthony C. Baines, and Roderick D. Cannon, "Bagpipe," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 1, 19-32; and R. D. Cannon, "Bagpipes in English Works of Art," *The Galpin Society Journal* 42 (1989): 10-31.
 28. Angelo Ottolini, ed., *Il Decamerone* (Milan, 1932), 20. For the performance of music in the *Decameron*, see Howard Mayer Brown, "Fantasia on a Theme by Boccaccio," *Early Music* 5 (1977): 324-39. One of the gentlemen plays the lute, while one of the ladies plays the viola.
 29. Lorenzo the Magnificent, who underwent a number of fortunes and misfortunes, is alleged to have composed a song with lyrics of such a sentiment. See Walter H. Rubsamien, "The Music for 'Quant'è bella giovinezza' and Other Carnival Songs by Lorenzo de' Medici," in *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), 163-84.
 30. *The Parable of the Blind* is a pictorial manifestation of a famous biblical story, but Bruegel's execution of it superimposed past and present. The church, village, and landscape were those of the sixteenth century. Indeed, the place has been identified as being the church village of Pede-Sainte-Anne in Brabant. On this point, see Claessens and Rousseau, *Bruegel*, pl. 115.
 31. See Albert P. de Mirimonde, *Astrologie et Musique* (Geneva: Minkoff, 1977).
 32. The bagpipe was also depicted in the hands of shepherds, a symbol of Christ.
 33. See Francis Baines and Edmund A. Bowles, "Hurdy-gurdy," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 8, 814-18; Christopher Page, "The Medieval Organistrum and *Symphonia* I: A Legacy from the East?" *The Galpin Society Journal* 35 (1982): 37-44.

34. The quotation is taken from Winternitz, *Musical Instruments*, 75. The engravings depicting street musicians of eighteenth-century Paris offer abundant evidence of the hurdy-gurdy as their chosen instrument; see Florence Gétreau, "Street Musicians of Paris: Evolution of an Image," *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography*, 23, nos. 1-2 (1998): 62-78.
35. Another instance of music being a vehicle for tragedy is the musical contest between Apollo and Marsyas. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Marsyas found a double-flute floating in a stream, not knowing that the instrument was enchanted by the magic spell, a curse of Pallas Athena. The divine music so pleased Marsyas's companions that they cried out that Apollo himself could not have made better music. Marsyas foolishly challenged Apollo and was flayed after he lost the contest. For the pictorial presentation of this contest in the Renaissance, see Edith Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images* (Newark: University of Delaware Press/London: Associated University Presses, 1996); Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, revised and enlarged ed. (New York: Norton, 1968), 171-76; and Winternitz, *Musical Instruments*, 150-65. There is a story of a blind Buddhist monk from medieval Japan whose talent in reciting *Heike-monogatari* (The tale of the Taira clan) with biwa accompaniment was such that the ghosts of the Taira Clan came to ask him for his performance, which nearly cost the musician's life. I am preparing a study of this subject, tentatively entitled "Earless Hoh-ichi and the Art of Narrative Singing."
36. For the popularity of Orpheus's life as a subject for dramas and operas in the Renaissance and the Baroque, see Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), originally published with the title *Li due Orfei* (Torino: Eri, 1969).
37. See Jack W. Sage, "A New Look at Humanism in Sixteenth-Century Lute and Vihuela Books," *Early Music* 20 (1992): 633-41. The significant resemblance between the drawing of a lutenist and two listeners on the title page of Francesco Marcolini's *Intabolatura di liuto* (Venice, 1536) and an account of one Monsieur de Ventemille [Jacques Descartes de Vintimille?] about Francesco da Milano's performance in Milan, which was printed in Pontus de Tyard, *Solitaire second ou prose de la musique* (Lyons, 1555), may have been based on the Orpheus legend. I am preparing a study of the Marcolini drawing, tentatively entitled "Orpheus in the Renaissance and the Power of Music."
38. On the medal made in 1457 by Giovanni Boldù, the inscription reads "PETRVS. BONNVS . . . ORPHEVM. SVPER]ANS"; reproduced in George F. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini* (London: British Museum, 1930), Pl. 79, no. 416. Moritz, Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, called Dowland the "English Orpheus" ("Anglorum Orphei"). The epithet is printed in Robert Dowland, ed., *Varietie of Lute-lessons* (London, 1610), f. H2v; see the facsimile edition by Schott (London, 1958).
39. See Hiroyuki Minamino, "Harping on a Lute String," *Discoveries: South-Central Renaissance Conference News and Notes* 16, no. 2 (1999): 5-6. Giambattista della Porta in his *Magiae naturalis libri viginti* of 1589 discusses musical magic of sheep-gut and wolf-gut strings. I am indebted to Linda Austern for this information. On Renaissance musical magic, see Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a History of Others* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
40. It should be reminded here that polyphonic music could be improvised with written parts.
41. See Nino Pirrotta's essays "New Glimpses of an Unwritten Tradition," "The Oral and Written Traditions of Music," and "Music and Cultural Tendencies in Fifteenth-Century Italy," all reprinted in his *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: A Collection of Essays, Studies in the History of Music*, 1 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 51-71, 72-79, and 80-112, respectively.
42. A blind German musician Conrad Paumann is alleged to have invented German lute tablature, possibly for dictation purposes. Paumann, an organist, lutenist, and composer, mainly dealt with the polyphonic music. On Paumann's alleged involvement in

- inventing German lute tablature and the critics who denounced the credibility of the story, see Minamino, "Conrad Paumann," 291–310. On the literacy of musicians, see Christopher Page, "Musicus and Cantor," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, eds. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 74–78.
43. Hans Newsidler, *Ein neues Lautenbüchlein* (Nuremberg, 1540), ff. D1–D1v. The volume is listed and described in Howard Mayer Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: A Bibliography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), as item 1540–1.
 44. It is transcribed in Adolf Kocirz, ed., *Österreichische Lautenmusik im 16. Jahrhundert*, Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich, XVIII/Bd. 37 (Vienna: Universal, 1911/ reprint, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 38 (transcribed in the nominal A tuning). My transcription reproduced here uses the nominal G tuning.
 45. On *Gassenhauer*, see Peter Branscombe, "Gassenhauer," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 7, 177–78. On the sixteenth-century German lute dance, see Jenny Dieckmann, *Die in deutscher Lautentabulatur überlieferten Tänze des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1931).
 46. Hans Newsidler, *Ein neueordent künstlich Lautenbuch* (Nuremberg, 1536), ff. x1–x1v. The volume is listed and described in Brown, *Instrumental Music*, as item 1536–6. A facsimile edition by Institute pro arte testudinis (Neuss am Rhein: Junghänel, Paffgen, Schäffer, 1974). The piece is transcribed in Kocirz, *Österreichische Lautenmusik im 16. Jahrhundert*, 35. My transcription reproduced here uses the nominal A tuning.
 47. An earlier instance of the tremolo style in lute compositions may be found in Joan Ambrosio Dalza's *Intabolutura di liuto libro quarto* (The fourth book of lute tablature), which Ottaviano Petrucci published in Venice in 1508. The section called "Piva" of a dance suite "Pavana alla venetiana" has a three-note tremolo figure throughout the section: it also uses the strumming style.
 48. Hans Judenkünig, *Ain schone kunstliche Underweisung* (Vienna, 1523), f. C1v, recommended that the strumming technique should especially be used for dance arrangements. The strumming technique may have originated in the plectrum-plucking technique of the fifteenth century. Some of the "ricercars" in the late-fifteenth-century Italian manuscript Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana, MS 1144 are made of passages in single notes and chords that are played on adjacent courses. On this manuscript, see Vladimir Ivanoff, *Das Pesaro-Manuskript: Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Lautentabulatur* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1988); and idem, ed., *Ein zentrale Quelle der frühen italienischen Lautenpraxis: Edition der Handschrift Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana, MS 1144* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1988).
 49. Newsidler's *Gassenhauer* of 1536 is based on an Italian *ostinato* bass known as *passamezzo moderno*. This dance formula may be found in Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, revised ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 524.
 50. Newsidler, *Ein neueordent künstlich Lautenbuch*, f. b3v. See Ephraim Segerman, "A Re-examination of the Evidence on Absolute Tempo before 1700—I," *Early Music* 24 (1996), 227–48, esp. 232; Minamino, "Sixteenth-Century Lute Treatises," 58–63; and idem, "On the Semibreve: Time Is Money," *Lute Society of America Quarterly* 33, nos. 1 and 2 (1998): 29–30.
 51. The quotation is taken from Keith Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.
 52. See Hans Radke, "Newsidler," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 13, 156.
 53. Schubert's song cycle "Winterreise" ends with a song "Der Leiermann" (The organ-grinder). Wilhelm Müller's poem describes an old beggar musician playing his tunes with frozen fingers on a frosty street in a village and a young wanderer's wish to make a journey with the musician.