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Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century

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H. Colin SLIM, *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*. Variorum: Collected Studies Series, CS727 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002), xii, 358 p. 98 b/w illustrations. ISBN 0-86078-869-5. 117.95US$.

In sixteenth-century secular paintings one sees figures (either real or mythological), landscape, or objects. Hardly anyone notices a piece of scratch paper or a portion of a book. The hand of a figure or part of a musical instrument sometimes hides it. But a cunning viewer may spot some words or musical notes written on it. At first the inscription seems to be irrelevant to the painting, perhaps added just to fill blank space. In fact, art historians have long ignored this "insignificant" detail. It is, however, natural to be curious about why the painter included a musical inscription, whether it is stylized notation or a real musical composition, whether one can identify it, and what is the relationship between the painting and the musical composition.

Anyone who is familiar with Volker Scherliess's *Musikalische Noten auf Kunstwerken der italienischen Renaissance bis zum Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1972) immediately realizes that his work, though valuable and informative, is actually a starting point for much more interesting investigations. H. Colin Slim had, before Scherliess published his book, already plunged into the fascinating world of musical inscriptions in Renaissance paintings, fully recognizing the benefit that such research might provide to both musicology and art history. What Ashgate published as one of the latest additions to its Variorum Collected Studies Series with the title *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography* is a collection of eighteen articles on musical inscriptions Slim has previously published. The book contains essays ranging from his earliest work on musical iconography of 1964 to one of his most recent publications of 1998. This is a welcome production by Ashgate, for the book includes several articles which until now had only been available in obscure publications. A case in point is "The Prodigal Son at the Whores'" that was first given as part of the distinguished faculty lecture series at the University of California at Irvine in 1976, of which only a limited number of commemorative editions were subsequently distributed.

All but two are in the original form. The first two articles, one on musical inscriptions first published *RIdIM Newsletter*, the precursor in this JOURNAL, the other on portraits of Francesco da Milano first included in Slim's bio-bibliographical study of the lutenist, are revised for this book. The topic of the first article allows Slim to lay out his method of researching musical inscriptions, serving conveniently as an introduction to the book. The second article was revised because of some new speculations about portraits said to depict Francsco, which Slim considers dubious. The rest of the sixteen essays are reproductions; therefore, printing quality and format of each article vary. The original pagination has been maintained, rather than being given a new, continuous numbering. This prac-

tice allows the reader to quote the original page number even if he or she does not have access to the original publication. Corrections and additions with an updated bibliography for each article are added at the end of the book (with a new bibliography for revised articles). The quality of the reproduction of the illustrations, crucial to Slim's discussion of the paintings, is satisfactory overall. Bibliographical information on the place and date of the original publications supplied by the publisher in the table of contents, however, contains incomplete or inaccurate data. Therefore, I have provided a complete list of Slim's works on musical iconography at the end of this review. (I wish to express my thanks to Professor Slim for his help.) Ashgate supplies a Roman numeral to each article that corresponds with the Roman numeral in my list.

As my list indicates, there are several articles left out of the book. Although Slim was mainly responsible for choosing his articles, the publisher's concern for the size of the book restricted him. Therefore some longer articles, such as Dosso Dossi's musical allegory that was published in *The Journal of the American Musicological Society*, were omitted. Moreover, the publisher's and author's concerns for a variety of subject matter contributed to omitting the article on instrumental versions of "O waerde mont" which would have complemented the other two studies on Mary Magdalene (Articles V & VI).

The articles, presented in chronological order, have been chosen to represent Slim's methods of researching musical inscriptions. In the author's preface, Slim points out his three approaches for the selection of his articles. First, "a single work of art containing a musical inscription with an attempt to show how knowledge of the music might help us better to understand the former" (Articles II, IV, V, VI, XI, XV, XVII). Second, "a single topic recurring in a number of art works, some of which contain musical inscriptions" (Articles III, VII, IX, XIV, XVI, XVIII). Third, "a survey of musical choices made by one artist and his ensuing school" (Article VIII). By identifying the musical composition included in paintings, Slim seeks to connect the theme of the music with that of the painting, in most cases offering a new date, a new meaning, or a new interpretation of the painting. Together with the symbolism of musical instruments, the lyrics or genre of a composition help to determine the painter's intention in including a musical inscription.

Slim's interest in unfolding the mystery of musical inscriptions in sixteenth-century paintings requires him to take an interdisciplinary approach. He combines musicology, art history, and literature. As one of his graduate students when he offered a seminar on an early sixteenth-century Flemish painting of Mary Magdalene (Article V), I observed his methods first hand. By identifying the Fle-

mish chanson "O waerde mont" from a bit of a musical inscription (the beginning of an intabulation of the chanson in French lute tablature), Slim showed us how to search every corner of the painting for clues.

Although Slim does not emphasize its importance because it was not his main concern, particularly interesting for scholars of lute music is the series of articles on Mary Magdalene paintings of Franco-Flemish origin where several examples of French lute tablature are included. These paintings may date from the 1520s, possibly making them the earliest known examples of French lute tablature found in northern countries. (The earliest example of French lute tablature, in the so-called Pesaro lute manuscript, possibly originates from Italy in the late fifteenth century, and the earliest printed example is in Pierre Attaingnant's lute book of 1529). The type of French lute tablature found in these Franco-Flemish paintings differs in notational practices from examples of French lute tablature found in French sources. Whether this type of French lute tablature should be called "Flemish lute tablature" remains to be investigated.

A short article on Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a lutenist's hand is intriguing. (A much extended version, "Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman" of 1997, is listed below.) Slim points out that the way the lutenist holds the neck of a lute is technically awkward and that other paintings such as those by Bartolommeo Veneto in 1520 may have had some relevance to Leonardo's sketch since all depict a similar left-hand position. The left hand grips the fingerboard and the thumb comes to the top of the fingerboard. This posture may be perfectly correct and realistic for the late fifteenth century when the drawing was made. The posture depends on the size of the lute, the size of the player's hand, the position of the lute (e.g., whether the player puts the lute down on a table or holds it without any extra support), and the manner of plucking the strings (either with a plectrum or with bare fingers.) The lute of Leonardo's time had a narrower fingerboard than later ones since it had fewer courses (either five or six), and it may have been necessary for the player to grip the fingerboard. Gripping a lute's fingerboard was mentioned by Johannes Tinctoris in his *De inventione et usu musicae* written about 1480.

It is a great honor for a former student to offer a word of caution to his mentor. Slim conjectures the exact musical note the player (often the lutenist) is producing by noticing his or her fingering position on the fingerboard in the painting. Slim may be correct. But I would like to point out that other interpretations are also possible because of uncertainties surrounding the relationship between the lute tuning and finger positions. First, as Slim knows, the sixteenth-century lutenists did not have the concept of absolute pitch on the lute but employed several nominal tunings. Second, the lutenist may use the technique of "tenuto," a technique that enables the player to sustain the note once it is plucked by leaving a left-hand finger on the fret. Third, the player may extend a left-hand finger on a fret for the preparation of plucking the next note. Therefore, the finger position depicted in a painting may not tell the exact musical note the player is producing.

One sees the musical inscription in a painting but does not hear the sound. Even if the music is identified and a transcription provided, one still may not grasp the atmosphere implied by the music. Slim accomplished this task in his presidential address for the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting at Oakland in 1990. Gently mocking an annual series called the "Living Pageant of Masters" in Laguna Beach, California, where he lives, he presented Maerten van Heemskerck's "Apollo and the Muses on Parnassus" (the New Orleans Museum of Arts) as a *tableau vivant*. (This painting is discussed in his two-part article in *Musica Disciplina*). The group "Apollo and the Muses" performed a chanson "Qui belles amours" and a piece called "Den lustelicke Mey" that Slim identified from the painting. The playing and dancing by Apollo and the Muses enabled the twentieth-century audience to imagine a mythological Parnassus through music from sixteenth-century Low Countries.

Slim's *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century* is a welcome addition to Ashgate's Variorum Collected Studies Series. By reading through the chronologically arranged articles, one can trace Slim's progress as a scholar as well as the development of our understanding in the field of musical iconography over the past forty years. He shows us how sixteenth-century musical inscriptions should be studied. His methods are models for those who study musical iconography and musical inscriptions in particular. The book is highly recommended for readers of this JOURNAL.

Since 1964 Slim has been working on a catalog of musical inscriptions, so far uncovering about 1200 examples of real and stylized notation in art works in western art from antiquity to about 1600. It is hoped that he continues to produce many more fascinating studies and that Ashgate undertakes to publish a sequel to *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century*.

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I. "Some Thoughts on Musical Inscriptions", *RIdIM Newsletter* II/2 (1977), 24-27.

II. "Francesco da Milano (1497-1543/44): A bio-bibliographical study, I", *Musica Disciplina* XVIII (1964), 63-84 [pp. 81-84 on the alleged portraits of Francesco da Milano, revised as "Some possible likenesses of Francesco Canova da Milano, 1499-1543].

III. "The Prodigal Son at the Whores': Music, Art, and Drama", *Distinguished Faculty Lecture, 1975-76*, presented 21 May 1976, Irvine, CA (Irvine: University of California, 1977).

IV. "A Motet for Machiavelli's Mistress and a Chanson for a Courtesan", *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, edited by Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 2:457-72.

V. "Mary Magdalene, Musician and Dancer", *Early Music* VIII/4 (1980), 460-73.

VI. "Mary Magdalene, *mondaine musicale*", *Report of the Twelfth Congress Berkeley 1977, International Musicological Society*, edited by Daniel Heartz and Bonnie C. Wade (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1981), 816-24.

VII. "Paintings of Lady Concerts and the Transmission of 'Jouissance vous donneray' ", *Imago Musicae* I (1984), 51-73.

VIII. "Musical Inscriptions in Paintings by Caravaggio and his Followers", *Music and Context:Essays for John M. Ward*, edited by Anne Dhu Shapiro (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 241-63.

IX. "Music in and out of Egypt: A Little-Studied Iconographical Tradition", *Musica Disciplina* XXXVII (1983), 289-326.

X. "Music in Majolica", *Early Music* XII/3 (1984), 371-73.

XI. "Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo's *Portrait of a Man with a Recorder*", *Early Music* XIII/3 (1985), 398-406.

XII. "Tintoretto's 'Music-Making Women' at Dresden", *Imago Musicae* IV (1987), 45-76.

XIII. "Arcadelt's 'Amor, tu sai' in an Anonymous Allegory", *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* II (1987), 91-106.

XIV. "The Lutenist's Hand", *Achademia Leonardi Vinci: Journal of Leonardo Studies and Bibliography of Vinciana* 1 (1988), 32-34.

XV. "An Iconographical Echo of the Unwritten Tradition in a Verdelot Madrigal", *Studi Musicali* XVII (1988), 35-54.

XVI. "Two Paintings of 'Concert Scenes' from the Veneto and the Morgan Library's Unique Music Print of 1520", *In Cantu et in Sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday*, Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2. Edited by Fabrizio Della Seta and Franco Piperno (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1989), 155-74.

XVII. "Lasso's *La cortesia voi, donne, predicate*: A villanesca printed, penned, plucked, and depicted", *Le Concert des Voix et des Instruments à la Renaissance: Actes du XXXIV⁰ Colloque International d'Etudes Humanistes Tours, 1–11 juillet 1991*, edited by Jean-Michel Vaccaro and Howard Mayer Brown (Paris: CNRS, 1995), 243-54.

XVIII. "Valid and Invalid Opinions for Performing Frottole as Implied in Visual Sources", *'La musique, de tous les passetemps le plus beau...': Hommage à Jean-Michel Vaccaro*, edited by François Lesure and Henri Vanhulst (Paris : CNRS, 1998), 317-331.

Other works on music iconography by H. Colin Slim:

"The Prodigal Son at the Courtesans", *RIdIM Newsletter* I/1 (1975), 5 [abstract].

"Two Musical Fragments from Peter Candid's Destroyed 'Allegory of the Seven Liberal Arts'", *Altro Polo: Essays on Italian Music in the Cinquecento*, edited by Richard Charteris (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1990), 178-89.

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"The Scholar and the Music Librarian", *Harvard Library Bulletin* II/1 (1991), 43-54.

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"From Copenhagen and Paris: A Stravinsky Photograph-Autograph at The University of British Columbia", *Notes*, 2nd series, Music Library Association [(2003), 542-555] [forthcoming].