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JOHANNES AND CAROLUS FERNANDEZ, FIFTEENTH-CENTURY COMPOSERS OF MUSIC FOR LUTE

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Jon Banks's stimulating article on the connection between the so-called Segovia manuscript and the lute music of the fifteenth century, published in *The Lute* (1994) has prompted me to speculate on another 'instrumental' piece in the same manuscript. The composition in question, on ff. 195^v-7 of the manuscript, is attributed to 'Fernandis et frater ejus' and bears the inscription 'Cecus non judicat de coloribus' (the blind cannot judge colour).¹ This Latin tag seems more likely to be a sort of commentary or epithet than a title, or the incipit of a text. It had its origins in antiquity. It appears in Aristotle's *Physics*, 2.1, where it can be paraphrased as 'Caecus natus non potest disputare de coloribus quantum ad rem, sed quantum ad nomen'. It became a commonplace expression in the Renaissance. Giovanni Spataro, for instance, used a similar phrase, 'cecus non judicat de colore', in a letter of 1528 to a fellow music theorist, Giovanni del Lago.² The meaning of the tag is that the ignoramus or the novice cannot appreciate subtleties which are apparent to the learned or initiated.³

It is the identity of the composers which makes it likely that this composition was written for and performed on instruments—and which makes the use of the Latin tag pointedly ironic. The composition is attributed to 'Fernandis et frater ejus' (Fernandis and his brother). The Segovia manuscript has strong associations with Spain and with Burgundy. It was copied around 1502 for use at the court of Queen Isabella, and some of the compositions it contains may have been brought to Spain when Philip the Fair made a tour there in 1502.⁴ A Burgundian court account book records payments to Johannes and Carolus Fernandez: a pension payment in 1468 and a New Year's gift in 1470. They are referred to as sons of 'feu Jehan de Fernandes'.⁵ This Jehan de Fernandes must have been the legendary blind Spanish instrumentalist Jehan Fernandez who, together with his blind companion Jehan de Cordoval, had been employed for two decades at the court of Burgundy.⁶ The Flemish theorist and composer Johannes Tinctoris, in his music treatise *De inventione et usu musicae*, written about 1480 in Naples, described his encounter with the brothers Johannes and Carolus Orbus at Bruges, a meeting which may have occurred between 1476 and 1480.⁷ Tinctoris expressed his admiration for the brothers' musicianship, particularly their mastery on the 'viola cum arculo', the instrument most likely to have been known as the *vielle* at the court of Burgundy (the four-stringed mediaeval fiddle). The brothers' surname used by Tinctoris may have referred to their physical characteristics; 'orbus' in Latin means either 'blind' or 'orphan'. (Indeed, Tinctoris called the blind German

instrumentalist Conrad Paumann 'Orbus ille germanus' in the same treatise).⁸ Johannes and Carolus were hired on 21 January 1482 by the chapter of St Donatian in Bruges as deputy organists.⁹ Johannes was described as nearly blind ('semicecus'), but was regarded as suitable for the post because of his superb organ playing. He resigned this post on 4 March of the same year to comply with a summons by the Bishop of Tournai to make a trip to Rome. Tinctoris praised both Johannes and Carolus not only as excellent musicians but also for their knowledge of literature ('litteris eruditos'). This makes it seem 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, retiring from the chair of ethics in 1491, and that Carolus is identical with the rector who taught literature at the same university.¹⁰ Both Johannes and Carolus are further recorded as instrumentalists to Charles VIII in 1488 and 1490.¹¹ Johannes died in 1496, and a German humanist, Johannes Trithemius, wrote a homage. Carolus was certainly dead by 1506, when Jodocus Badius Ascensis published a homage entitled *Epistolae Caroli Phernand*.¹²

Johannes and Carolus Fernandez were the immediate successors of the tradition of stringed instrument playing at the Burgundian court. Their musical style and performance practice must have reflected those of Johan Fernandez and Jehan de Cordoval who were praised as players of the *vielle* and lute. Johannes and Carolus Fernandez were also masters of several instruments. Their composition 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. The instrumental character of the music may be seen in the extensive use of sequences with continuous motion, scalar fragments over wide musical ranges, and stretto-like imitations. It is therefore hard to avoid the conclusion that the Fernandez brothers' composition is an example of late fifteenth-century instrumental music, playable in ensemble, on organs, harps, 'violae cum arcu' or lutes.¹³

Notes

I am grateful to Dr Arthur Ness for his comments on this paper.

- 1 This point is made in Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (Oxford, 1985), p. 143.
- 2 See Bonnie J. Blackburn, Edward E. Lowinsky and Clement A. Miller, eds, *A Correspondence of Renaissance Musicians* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 330–4, especially p. 330, n. 3.

3. Segovia Cathedral, Archivo Musical, no shelf number, ff. 195^v-7. The piece is transcribed in Edward R. Lerner, ed., *Alexandri Agricola: Opera omnia*, Corpus mensurabilis musicae, 22 (N.p: American Institute of Musicology, 1970), 5: pp 102-5. The hidden meaning in this composition is discussed in my study 'Bruegel's Minstrel and the Beggar's Dance' (in preparation).
4. See Higini Anglès, 'Un manuscrit inconnu avec polyphonie de XVe siècle conservé à la cathédrale de Ségovie', *Acta musicologica* 8 (1936), pp. 6-17; idem, *La musica en la corte de los reyes catolicos*, Monumentos de la musica española 1 (Barcelona, 1960), pp. 106-12; and *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400-1550*, Renaissance Manuscript Studies 1 (N.p: American Institute of Musicology, 1984), 3: pp. 137-8; A. Baker, 'An Unnumbered Manuscript of Polyphony in the Archives of the Cathedral of Segovia: its Provenance and History' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1978) was unavailable for the present study.
5. Paula Higgins, review of Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1989), p. 159, n. 20
6. For a biography of Fernandez and Cordoval see Jean Marix, *Histoire de la musique et des musiciens de la cour de Bourgogne sous la règne de Philippe le Bon (1420-1467)*, Sammlung musikwissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen, vol. 29 (Baden-Baden, 1974), pp. 117-18; and Albert Van der Linden, 'Les aveugles de la cour de Bourgogne', *Revue Belge de musicologie* 4 (1950), pp. 74-6. For their performance in Chambery in 1434 see Craig Wright, 'Dufay at Cambrai: Discoveries and Revisions', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 28 (1975), p. 180. Jehan Fernandez appears in the Burgundian documents as 'Jehan Ferant' (1433), 'Jehan Ferrand' (1434), 'Jehan Ferrandez' (1435-41, 1444-5, 1449-56), 'Jehan de Ferrandez' (1442, 1447); see Marix, *Histoire de la Musique*, pp. 267-73.
7. For the relevant passages, see Karl Weinmann, *Johannes Tinctoris (1445-1511) und sein unbekannter Traktat 'De inventione et usu musicae'* (2nd edition, Tutzing, 1961), p. 45; and Anthony Baines, 'Fifteenth-Century Instruments in Tinctoris's *De inventione et usu musicae*' in *The Galpin Society Journal* 3 (1950), p. 24. For the date of the compilation of the treatise, see Ronald Woodley, 'The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise *De inventione et usu musicae*' in *Early Music History* 5 (1985), pp. 241-5. For Tinctoris' trip north, see idem, 'Johannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34 (1981), pp. 235-6.
8. 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), pp. 291-310. 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.

- 9 See Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, p. 32.
- 10 Ibid, p. 88. Tinctoris regarded the bowed 'viola' as an instrument suitable for the recitation of epic poems as well as for sacred music.
- 11 See André Pirro, 'L'Enseignement de la musique aux universités françaises', *Acta musicologica* 2 (1930), p. 46.
- 12 See Strohm, op. cit, p. 88, and Pirro, op. cit, p. 47, respectively. A 'Petit Jean Ferrand' is recorded as 'joueur de lute et pattissier' in Lyons in 1499; see Frank Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 125, 289.
- 13 There is some evidence against the attribution of the piece to the brothers. Some other extant sources ascribe it to Alexander Agricola or to Heinrich Isaac. Did one of these learn the composition from one of the others? There were ample opportunities for the direct encounter between the Fernandez brothers and Agricola. Agricola was at Cambrai in 1476, while the Fernandez brothers lived in Bruges until 1482. Agricola was in France before 1491 and returned in 1492, while the Fernandez brothers were teaching in Paris for most of the last two decades of the fifteenth century. Yet there is no firm evidence to prove either that the composition was the product of cooperation between the Fernandez brothers and Agricola, or that Agricola 'arranged' or 'refined' the brothers' piece that had first been made *in extempore*. For a biography of Agricola, see Martin Picker, 'A Letter of Charles VIII of France Concerning Alexander Agricola' in *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese*, ed. Jan La Rue et al, (New York, 1978), pp. 665-72; Allan W. Atlas, 'Alexander Agricola and Ferrante I of Naples', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30 (1977), pp. 313-19; and idem and Anthony M. Cummings, 'Agricola, Ghiselin, and Alfonso II of Naples', *The Journal of Musicology* 7 (1989), pp. 540-8. There are instrumental arrangements made in the first half of the sixteenth century: two lute intabulations by Hans Newsidler in his lute books published in Nuremberg in 1536, one ensemble version for three instruments with the inscription 'Cecorum', by Hieronymus Formschneider published in Nuremberg in 1538, and an anonymous organ intabulation with the inscription 'Diva parens' in a sixteenth-century German manuscript. The sources of these pieces are, respectively: Hans Newsidler, *Ein Newgeordent Kunstliche Lautenbuch* (Nuremberg, 1536), f. g4^v and *Der ander theil des Lautenbuchs* (Nuremberg, 1536), f. P2; listed in H. M. Brown, *Instrumental Music Printed before 1600: a Bibliography* (Cambridge, Mass, 1967) as items 1536/6 no. 22 and 1536/7 no. 27; Hieronymus Formschneider, publ. *Trium vocum carmina a diversis musicis composita* (Nuremberg, 1538), ff. D3^v-D4 (Brown, op. cit, 1538/2 no. 27); St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 530, f. 12^v 'Diva parens', see Letner, *Alexander Agricola*, LXXVI.