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PETRUCCI'S ALPHABET SERIES: THE ABC'S OF MUSIC,  
MEMORY AND MARKETING\*

by JOHN KMETZ

To the memory of the  
World Trade Center

Let's face it, the title has a nice ring to it. But is it a ring that resonates with any truth or is it just pure marketing hype constructed by an American businessman who knows something about music and memory in the Renaissance, but knows very little about Petrucci? In the next 28 minutes, I will ask a lot of questions about music, memory and marketing as they pertain to Petrucci's alphabet series and particularly to a performance practice issue inherent in the series. I promise that I will provide you with as many answers as I can in the time allotted.

In the meantime, let's start some of the questions. With the publication of *Odhecaton A*, *Canti B* and *Canti C* did Petrucci go to market with a specific client-base in mind, and, if so, how international were they? Did they travel? Were they multicultural? Could they understand a language other than their own? What did they do for a living? Did they have money? Were they musically literate? And if they were, what did they sing, what did they play, or (should I just ask the question) what did they do with three anthologies of polyphonic song none of which carried a song text? Answers to these questions would obviously have an enormous impact on how we edit and perform the 300-odd songs preserved in the alphabet series. Indeed, answers to these questions could enable us to solve one of the most annoying problems that we face today not only as Petrucci scholars, but also as scholars of Renaissance music: What do we do, or what did they do, with untexted song anthologies?

Many of us in this room continue to conclude that the absence of text in Petrucci's alphabet series is an indication of instrumental performance. Yet, when we are asked to produce modern editions and performances of Petrucci's alphabet series or of the many other untexted songbooks that date from

\* With the exception of the footnotes, the text printed in this article retains exactly the spoken version of the paper that I delivered in Basel on January 26, 2001. I have chosen to do this not because I am unwilling or unable to rewrite or revise it for publication, but because I strongly feel that the reader should experience what was actually heard and discussed at length at the conference. I must admit that this paper was delivered at other universities in Europe and North America since January 2001. Yet, it should be noted that I never once altered its presentation in any way, shape or form. Consequently, I have no one to thank for any recommendations, advice or generosity, except for my editor Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm. Knowing that my city of New York was in serious trouble after September 11, 2001 and that my firm of Arthur Andersen was on the verge of collapse four months later, Dr. Hoffmann-Axthelm gave me the extra time to get my footnotes done and to get the paper finished. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank her for her compassion and understanding.

this time, we don't hesitate to underlay a text from another source, even if that source is geographically or chronologically remote.<sup>1</sup> Since this seems to be an accepted practice for us (a practice which by the way I have no problem endorsing) is there any reason why sixteenth-century musicians in the possession of Petrucci's alphabet series didn't do the same?

In the paper I will offer you three propositions, each of which is closely interrelated. The first is that regardless of whether Petrucci had the poetic texts or not for his alphabet series, he would have omitted them because he was marketing an international repertory of song to an international client base many of whom did not understand French, as we will see when we identify some of the owners and users of the alphabet series. My second proposition is that both Petrucci and his customers were well aware of the role that memory played in the performance of music, regardless of whether that music was texted or untexted. My third and final proposition is that by A) memorizing the music first and then by B) underlaying a text at sight from a separate songtext sheet or songtext book, a singer would arrive at C) singing texted versions of Petrucci's untexted songbooks – versions which could be produced easily in any language, at any time, at any place. To demonstrate how simple this ABC method is, I will conclude my paper with a performance of Hayne van Ghizighem's „De tous biens plaine“, where the singer will perform a German contrafactum of this famous chanson by holding in her hand only a songtext. In the meantime, let's start by looking at how Petrucci went to market.

### *Petrucci goes to Market.*

As we all know, in 1498 Petrucci submitted a petition to the Venetian government requesting the exclusive privilege of printing „figured music“ and intabulations for organ and lute in the Venetian dominions for 20 years. The privilege, which was more or less the equivalent of a patent on his invention, was granted on May 25th of that year and seems to have held for the 20 years that Petrucci requested, since no other printer issued music in Venice before 1520.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aside from the well-known editions by Helen Hewitt of the *Odhecaton (Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A, Cambridge, Mass., 1942)* and of *Canti B (Ottaviano Petrucci, Canti B Numero Cinquanta, Venezia 1502, Chicago and London, 1967. Monuments of Renaissance Music, II)*, there are several modern editions of untexted fifteenth-century song manuscripts or of individual compositions contained in those manuscripts which underlay texts. Among them, I would highly recommend Howard M. Brown's *A Florentine chansonnier from the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Ms Banco Rari 229, Chicago and London 1983 (Monuments of Renaissance Music, VII)*.

<sup>2</sup> Among the several places where the privilege is reprinted and/or its implications discussed see Anton Schmid, *Ottaviano dei Petrucci da Fossombrone, der erste Erfinder des Musiknotendruckes mit beweglichen Metalltypen und seine Nachfolger im sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, Vienna 1845, 19; Gustave Reese, „The first printed collection of part-music (the Odhecaton),“ *MQ* 20 (1934) 40; Claudio Sartori, *Bibliografia delle opere musicali stampate da Ottaviano Petrucci, Florence 1948*, 19; Daniel Heartz, *Pierre Attaingnant. Royal printer of music. A historical study and bibliographical catalogue*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1969, 107–9; Helen Hewitt, *Harmonice*, 5; Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, eds. *Music in the Western world. A history in documents*, New York and London 1984, 89–90.

While this privilege certainly proves that intellectual property was valued as much then as it is today by such corporate giants as Microsoft, General Electric and Novartis, what strikes me about the privilege is Petrucci's request that no other printed books of polyphony or tabulature could be imported, sold and/or traded within the Venetian realm, without incurring a penalty of no less than 10 ducats per copy. Consequently, it would seem reasonable to assume that Petrucci, like other printers of his time, seemed to be well aware of the fact that if he was going to survive as a printer of luxury goods destined for a niche market of well-heeled individuals, he needed the exclusive right to print and sell those goods in Venice, and he needed to discourage anyone from the outside encroaching on his territory. Yet, when his original privilege came up for renewal in 1514, we find out that Petrucci's business is not doing very well. From the document, we learn that he has taken on two partners, Amadeo Scotto and Niccolò di Raphael. We also learn that this newly formed partnership is having a hard time exporting books, which is consequently tying up capital and causing great loss and sacrifice for the partnership as a whole. What I find noteworthy here, as did Daniel Heartz over 20 years ago, is the emphasis upon the export market.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one could get the impression that it was not the local Venetian market that was keeping Petrucci and his colleagues afloat, but rather a foreign market. This market, at least for the alphabet series, consisted of such individuals as Raimund Fugger, Peter Schoeffer, Christian Egenolff, Aegidius Tschudi and Fridolin Sicher, to name just a few of the German-speaking merchants and musicians who either owned a copy of the series or reproduced its contents for pleasure or for profit.<sup>4</sup> Each of these

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Heartz, *Pierre Attaingnant*, 108.

<sup>4</sup> That each of these individuals owned or had access to one or more volumes of the alphabet series is clear, based on archival or philological evidence. Working from the inventories of books once owned by Raimund Fugger, Richard Schaal has shown that the Fuggers of Augsburg owned many Petrucci volumes, among them an *Odhecaton* as well as a *Canti C* („Die Musikbibliothek von Raimund Fugger d.J.: ein Beitrag zur Musiküberlieferung des 16. Jahrhunderts,“ *AM* 29 [1957] 126). In the case of the printers Peter Schöffer d.J. and Christian Egenolff, there is little doubt that both owned copies of *Canti B*. Schöffer, for example, republished the volume in 1513, as Walter Senn documented in „Das Sammelwerk ‚Quinquagena Carminum‘ aus der Offizin Peter Schöffers d.J.“, in: *AM* 36 (1964) 183–185. Likewise, Egenolff reproduced in his prints (RISM 1535<sup>10</sup>, 1535<sup>11</sup> and [c.1535]<sup>13</sup>) blocks of individual pieces with the same readings as those found in *Canti B*, as Martin Staehelin discussed in „Petruccis Canti B in deutschen Musikdrucken des 16. Jahrhunderts,“ in: *Gestalt und Entstehung musikalischer Quellen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 1998 (edited by M. Staehelin, Wolfenbüttler Forschungen. Quellenstudien zur Musik der Renaissance III) 125–132. Philological evidence is also compelling for arguing that Fridolin Sicher (who owned and possibly copied St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 461) and Aegidius Tschudi (who owned and did copy St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 463) reproduced many pieces directly from the *Odhecaton* in their manuscripts. For a discussion of the Sicher manuscript and its relationship to the *Odhecaton* see David Fallows' introduction to *The Songbook of Fridolin Sicher, around 1515*, Peer 1996, 5, 11–12. Regarding the several concordances between the Tschudi manuscript and the *Odhecaton*, and if I may add often with identical readings, see Donald Loach, *Aegidius Tschudi's songbook (St. Gall MS 463): A humanistic document from the circle of Heinrich Glarean*, 2 vols (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley 1969) vol. 1, 80.

individuals had education, money and an interest in collecting or capitalizing on some of the best music of their time, which in the early sixteenth century was unquestionably the Franco-Flemish song repertory.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, none of these German speakers, as far as I can ascertain, possessed a command of the French language, with the possible exception of Raimund Fugger, the international banker.<sup>6</sup>

That Petrucci chose to launch his business by issuing a series of polyphonic song books which contained precisely this repertory made good business sense, and it made it in more ways than one. First of all, this repertory clearly had international appeal, as the concordance lists compiled by Helen Hewitt<sup>7</sup> or Stanley Boorman<sup>8</sup> for these books make clear. At the same time, it was a repertory that was available to Petrucci locally and presumably in abundance, as is suggested by the many late fifteenth-century Italian manuscripts preserving Franco-Flemish songs,<sup>9</sup> and by the many Franco-Flemish composers who were resident as expatriates in Italy at this time.<sup>10</sup> In short, Petrucci had, at least

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the studies cited in footnote 4 which contain information on each of these German speakers, I would also recommend consulting *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, where separate entries on each individual can be found.

<sup>6</sup> That German-speaking musicians were not particularly fond of the French language, or for that matter could speak a word of it, is reasonably clear by looking at any one of the many manuscript sources containing French songs copied by a German speaker. One source that immediately comes to mind is the famous songbook of Dr. Hartmann Schedel (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 3232). Schedel's abilities with the French language were clearly limited as any one of the many French texted pieces he copied demonstrates. Indeed, Schedel, like just about every other German music scribe I have encountered who copied French texted songs, tended to omit the French text, add a new text in Latin or produce such corrupt spelling of the original French that it is often impossible to identify a piece of French texted music by its text incipit alone. For an interpretation of the French pieces in the Schedel songbook with regard to performance practice see Keith Polk, *German instrumental music of the late Middle Ages: Players, patrons and performance practice*, Cambridge 1992, 138–45. For a different interpretation of Schedel's French pieces see John Kmetz's review of Polk's book in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119 (1994) 298–302.

<sup>7</sup> Hewitt, *Harmonice*, 129–67 and Hewitt, Ottaviano Petrucci, *Canti B*, 23–87.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Boorman, *Ottaviano Petrucci: catalogue raisonné*, Oxford, in press. I would like to thank Stanley Boorman for sharing his inventories of the alphabet series with me prior to their publication. Aside from the inventories of Hewitt and Boorman, transmission of the Franco-Flemish song repertory can also be found in David Fallows, *A catalogue of polyphonic songs, 1415–1480*, Oxford 1999.

<sup>9</sup> For a convenient list of the Italian manuscripts preserving the Franco-Flemish secular repertory see Louise Litterick, „Performing Franco-Netherlandish secular music of the late 15th century: Texted and untexted parts in the sources,“ *Early Music* 8 (1980) 484–485.

<sup>10</sup> Among the many singers, composers, theorists and musical directors who migrated to Italy in search of employment and whose music can be found in Petrucci's alphabet series are Josquin, Obrecht, Isaac, Alexander Agricola, Weerbeke, Japart, Tinctoris, Brumel, Compère, Martini, Ghiselin and Stockem. Each of these musicians would have certainly found Petrucci's printing press an attractive business proposition. I say this not because of the money they would have received from royalties, which as far as we know didn't exist at this time, but because of the handsome salaries and impressive credentials they could gain by acquiring an important musical post. For example, I can't imagine that when Josquin arrived in

in theory, plenty of supply available to him in 1501 to produce the alphabet series. If he didn't, I do not see how he would have been able to predict by 1501 that the *Odhecaton* would be the first volume in a projected series, to which *Canti B* and *C* would act as sequels over the next two to three years. While we are talking about good business sense, I also find it commendable that Petrucci choose to go to market with a series of ABC publications which he labeled accordingly, and not with a single, one-hit volume. Give them an A, and if they like it they will look for a B, and then a C. This serial technique obviously had marketing implications, as is clear by the tremendous success of the octavo series of classics issued by the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius at roughly the same time.<sup>11</sup>

That Petrucci had the supply side of his business equation under control seems reasonably clear. But what about the demand side? I have already mentioned that the repertory in the alphabet series is an international one, and I have suggested that Petrucci went to market with this repertory because he wished to reach an international market. I am able to draw these conclusions because of the many concordance lists and studies available today which document the transmission of the Franco-Flemish song repertory. But what about Petrucci? How much marketing intelligence did he possess? How many concordance lists did he own as he planned the contents of the alphabet series? For example,

- Did Petrucci know that Hayne von Ghizighem's settings of „De tous biens plaine“ and „Allez regretz“ were making their way around Europe as if they were pop songs promoted by Mick Jagger?<sup>12</sup> Or did he just stumble across this fact, and reproduce these and other hit songs in his series by accident?
- Did Petrucci have any idea that the musical texts to such songs were being reproduced throughout Europe as if they were made on a Xerox machine, while the poetical texts were often being omitted completely or severed at the head, thereby leaving only a garbled text incipit as a clue to what the

Ferrara in May of 1503, the appearance of his previously published music in the *Odhecaton*, *Canti B*, *Motetti A* or in the *Misse Josquin* was something that was held against him. On the contrary, wager that these publications helped him secure that Ferranese job, even though he required 200 ducats a year to show up, while the more amicable, quick-working and always willing-to-serve Isaac required only 120. Indeed, it delights me to have recently learned that Stanley Boorman has arrived at a similar conclusion in „The 500th anniversary of the first music printing: a history of patronage and taste in the early years,“ *Muzikološki Zbornik* 37 (2002) 33–49, particularly 40. In his article, Boorman argues that the *Misse Josquin* which appeared in September of 1502 was actually commissioned by Alfonso (the ducal heir-apparent) as a means of giving Josquin an edge over his rival Isaac for the job in Ferrara.

<sup>11</sup> On Aldus and his contribution to the art and business of printing see Martin Lowry, *The world of Aldus Manutius: Business and scholarship in Renaissance Venice*, Oxford 1979; George Fletcher, *New Aldine studies*, San Francisco 1988; and Paul G. Naiditch, editor, *A catalogue of the Ahmanson-Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA*, Los Angeles 1989–1994.

<sup>12</sup> For the most comprehensive list of concordances currently available for these two songs see David Fallows, *Catalogue*, 129–130 („De tous biens plaine“) and 81–83 („Allez regretz“).

original text might be?<sup>13</sup> Or did Petrucci stumble across these facts as well, as he produced a collection of songs with few alarming musical variants but with an alarming number of text incipits?

- Did Petrucci realize that there were many French rondeaux masquerading as Latin song motets throughout Europe as well as an equally large number of French songs carrying text incipits in Spanish, Italian and even in German?<sup>14</sup> In short,
- Did Petrucci suspect, like we do today, that the only place on the planet in 1501 where one might consistently hear French-texted performances of the Franco-Flemish song repertory was only in a French-speaking region or only at a foreign court where French was an acquired language?<sup>15</sup>

My answer to all of these questions is yes. Petrucci was aware of this information. How could he not be? He had a lot at stake, a lot more than I do in this paper or, for that matter, anyone in this room does in theirs. These were economic issues, not academic. These were issues driven by profit and the bottom line, not necessarily by a passion for music and its performance which bring us to Basel this week. Let's take a moment and think about this. Petrucci had at least three years invested in the research and development of his printing press, not to mention the time he spent or his colleague Castellanus spent collecting and editing the music, securing a privilege and creating a marketing strategy for that music. Aside from intellectual capital, there would have been the need for venture capital, which was used to compensate his editors and pressman, pay his suppliers for the raw materials and secure a physical space to conduct his business. Yes, Petrucci had a lot at stake and a lot of risk to manage. That risk certainly included making a decision as to what music was the most marketable and, in turn, the most profitable for his first publication.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> That the musical readings for this repertory do not vary significantly from one source to another is evident by examining the critical commentary for any one of the songs edited by Helen Hewitt (*Harmonice; Ottaviano Petrucci, Canti B*) or by Howard Mayer Brown (*A Florentine chansonnier*, vol. 1).

<sup>14</sup> While just about every study on the transmission of the Franco-Flemish song repertory will at one point or another mention that many French-texted songs were often reproduced with full texts or with text incipits in another language or with no text at all, the comprehensive treatment on the subject is found in Chapter XII of Howard Mayer Brown's *A Florentine channonnier*, vol. 1, 125–133.

<sup>15</sup> That French-texted performances of the Franco-Flemish song repertory were heard only in places where French was spoken is, of course, not a provocative conclusion and consequently has been endorsed by many scholars. Among those who have discussed the issue, I would recommend Louise Litterick's „Performing Franco-Netherlandish secular music,“ 474–485 and David Fallows' „French as a courtly language in fifteenth-century Italy: the musical evidence,“ *Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1989) 429–441.

<sup>16</sup> I make this statement assuming that Petrucci could read music. Yet there is no documentary evidence to show that Petrucci was actually musically literate, with the exception that he printed books of music. This worries me. I say this not as a musicologist but as a businessman who has worked with many well-known publishers of large corporations who print music, record music or issue books about music yet cannot read a note of music. Having said this, I

Now, I don't know about you, but if I were about to launch a business or, for that matter, an industry by printing polyphonic songs for which very few people seem to appreciate the original language, I would have omitted the poetic texts as well, regardless of whether I had them or not. Underlaying any texts to these sources could have complicated matters technically to a process that was already highly technical and in its infant stages.<sup>17</sup> And underlaying French texts could have alienated a large number of Petrucci's small number of customers. Let us not forget that no more than one percent of the European

still feel that if Petrucci was going to make a career out of printing music, especially since he was one of the first to do it, he would have been able to read music or at least would have been able to distinguish between what music was of quality and what was not, even if it meant from only a hearing of the music and not from a reading of it. While Petrucci's actual role in the compilation of the alphabet series still remains a mystery, much of the mystery once surrounding Petrus Castellanus, the editor of the *Odhecaton* (and probably of the subsequent *Canti B* and *C* volumes) has been resolved by Bonnie Blackburn in „Petrucci's Venetian editor: Petrus Castellanus and his musical garden,“ *Musica Disciplina* 49(1995)15–45. Indeed, in light of Blackburn's findings it would now seem reasonably safe to conclude that it was Castellanus who assembled and edited the music of the *Odhecaton* and realized the potential market value for it and for the two subsequent volumes of the alphabet series.

That little-known musicians, like Castellanus, were often cited in a book's preface because they were actually the ones responsible for the genesis of that book, can be supported by another early printed book of music, even though it dates from over 100 years later. Johannes Woltz, for example, in his introduction to the *Nova musices organicae tabulatura* (RISM 1617<sup>24</sup>), acknowledges the help of his nephew Christoph Liebfried in the production of this important volume of German organ tabulature. However, when one examines the manuscript collection of organ tabulature that Liebfried personally copied between 1585 and 1616 and then compares its contents and readings with that of Woltz's printed volume it is clear that Liebfried assembled the music, transcribed most if not all of its vocal compositions into tabulature, and created the layout and design for the volume. In short, it was Liebfried who was the real author of the book. Woltz was simply the publisher, as is made clear by Woltz's contemporary Remigius Faesch, who named Liebfried as the „author“ of the book in one of its surviving copies. On the Liebfried-Woltz relationship see John Kmetz, *Die Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Basel. Katalog der Musikhandschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Basel 1988, 170–175. The author is currently working on a detailed study of the genesis of the Woltz volume and its relationship to the Liebfried manuscripts.

<sup>17</sup> I make this statement knowing that Petrucci did underlay Latin texts in *Motetti A* in 1502 and that he did it quite successfully working in the same choirbook format he used for the alphabet series. However, unlike the motet volume wherein many compositions often span more than one opening and as such allow one the breathing room to underlay all of the text, most of the songs printed in the alphabet series were laid out with only one composition to an opening. Given the rather tight space allocated for each song in the alphabet series, especially for four-voice pieces, it would have been very difficult to underlay even one strophe of text to each of these songs, and virtually impossible to reproduce additional text strophes. This argument of course assumes that Petrucci had the texts to the songs, but decided to omit them. Although I cannot prove this, Stanley Boorman argued 25 years ago that Castellanus did indeed have French texts to some of the songs. Boorman's conclusion, based on philological evidence, is found in his seminal article „The 'First' Edition of the *Odhecaton A*,“ *JAMS* 30(1977)183–207, particularly 206–207.

population was probably musically literate at this time;<sup>18</sup> that less than half of that one percent could understand French as well;<sup>19</sup> and that less than half of that one half percent could afford Petrucci's books.<sup>20</sup>

Again, I don't know what you would have done, but given these observations, I would have done exactly what Petrucci did. I'd go to market with international goods. I'd market those goods to an international client base. And I'd do it in a way that would not alienate any specific language group within the European Community. These marketing techniques are precisely what most manufacturers of durable goods do today in our global economy. The Swedish company Ikea, for example, manufactures furniture that clearly has international appeal. Ikea markets and sells that furniture in any one of its 200 global locations. And when customers in Basel, Beijing or Boston purchase an Ikea product that requires some assembly or performance on their part, Ikea provides these customers with printed directions that contain no words, just pictures, thereby saving the company money by mitigating the risks inherent in multilingual packaging. Yes, the new economy we live in today is really not all that different from the new economy that Petrucci experienced in

<sup>18</sup> While I cannot provide music literacy numbers for all of Europe around 1501, I can roughly estimate the number of people in Switzerland who could read music (both white mensural and tabulature) in the early sixteenth century. For example, we know that the population of Switzerland in 1501 was approximately 560,000. Eighty-five per cent (i.e., 476,000) lived in small villages driven by an agrarian economy. The remaining 15 per cent (i.e., 84,000) resided in cities with a population of 5,000 or more. Assuming that very few people working the land could read music, we obviously are left with only the city dwellers as candidates for musical literacy. While musical literacy could have existed in the towns of 5,000, I suspect that most of the musically literate were found in the larger cities where commerce was not just local, but multi-regional or international. In Switzerland, these would have been the cities of Basel, Zurich and Geneva, which collectively make up about half of the 84,000 urban dwellers. Basel's population in 1501, for example, was about 10,000 and that number includes the 100 students who at the time were matriculated at its university. Of the students, I know of only five who could read music and of the remaining citizens who were merchants, craftsmen or humanists I know of only ten. My calculations are limited to the sources that are available to me and to my abilities as a sleuth. Indeed, I could easily imagine that my calculations are off not by one hundred per cent but by hundreds. However, even if that is true and that rather than 15 people there were 75 who could read music in Basel in 1501, we are still looking at a niche market. In short, it's still less than one per cent. I am currently working on a detailed study of musical literacy in Basel during the sixteenth century. This study will appear as a chapter in my forthcoming book entitled *Precinct of the muses: Essays on musical life in Renaissance Basel*.

<sup>19</sup> On the population of Europe around 1500 see Eugene Rice, „Recent Studies on the Population of Europe, 1348–1620,“ *Renaissance News* 28(1965)180–187.

<sup>20</sup> Petrucci's books were clearly luxury items destined for well-heeled individuals who had the taste to enjoy them and, more importantly, the money to afford them. On the extraordinary cost of a Petrucci book when compared to other Italian printers see Catherine Chapman, „Printed collections of polyphonic music owned by Ferdinand Columbus“, *JAMS* 21(1968) 51; and Dragan Plamenac, „Excerpta Colombina: items of musical interest in Fernando Colon's Regestrum,“ *Miscelánea en homenaje a Monseñor Higinio Anglés*, Barcelona 1958–1961, vol. 2, 663–687.

1501. Like our economy, Petrucci's economy was driven by foreign markets, by emerging technologies, by intellectual property and by a war for talent. Yes, history does repeat itself, at least economic history.<sup>21</sup>

Assuming that I am correct, and that Petrucci printed his songs without words because it simply made good business sense, we obviously then have to ask the question how relevant is the absence of text in the alphabet series for bolstering claims of only instrumental performance? My answer, it isn't relevant. Petrucci was a businessman who was selling music, not poetry. Music was his commodity, not texts. Now this is not to say that Petrucci's alphabet series wasn't used by an instrumentalist or by an ensemble of them. I'm sure it was, as indeed the Spinacino lute intabulations published by Petrucci in 1507 make clear,<sup>22</sup> and the so-called „fantasia“ pieces printed in the alphabet series suggest.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, I don't see why the absence of text in the alphabet series is any more of an indication for only instrumental performance than the presence of text in Petrucci's frottola series is for bolstering claims for only vocal performance. The reason that I believe this to be true is because of that thing called memory.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> That the economy we live in today is not all that different from the one experienced by citizens of the Renaissance see John Kmetz, „Blowing your horn in the new economy, c.1450–1600,“ in: *Tilman Susato and the Music of his Time: Print culture, compositional technique and instrumental music in the Renaissance*, edited by Keith Polk and Steward Carter (Pendragon Press, in press).

<sup>22</sup> For a list of the numerous concordances that exist between the alphabet series and the Spinacino lute intabulations as well as for a discussion of the relationship between these sources see Henry L. Schmidt III, *The first printed lute books: Francesco Spinacino's Intabulatura de Lauto; Libro Primo and Libro Secondo* (Venice: Petrucci, 1507), 2 vols (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1969), vol.1, 12–99.

<sup>23</sup> I am thinking particularly of those compositions carrying Italian text incipits with such titles as *La alfonsina*, *bernardina*, *morra*, and *spagna*. Aside from Helen Hewitt's seminal work on the subject in her edition of the *Odhecaton* (Harmonice, 74–78), see Honey Meconi, „Sacred tricinia and Basevi 2439“, in: *I Tatti studies. Essays in the Renaissance*, 4 (Florence: Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 1991) 151–199.

<sup>24</sup> Many of the ensuing arguments and evidence concerning the role that memory played in the performance of vocal music were published by the author in „Singing texted songs from untexted Songbooks: The evidence of the Basler *Liederhandschriften*,“ *Le concert des voix et des instruments* edited by Jean-Michel Vaccaro (=CNRS-Editions, 1995), 121–143. An expanded version of these arguments and of the evidence presented here will appear in the author's book *Music and Memory in the Renaissance*, Cambridge, forthcoming.

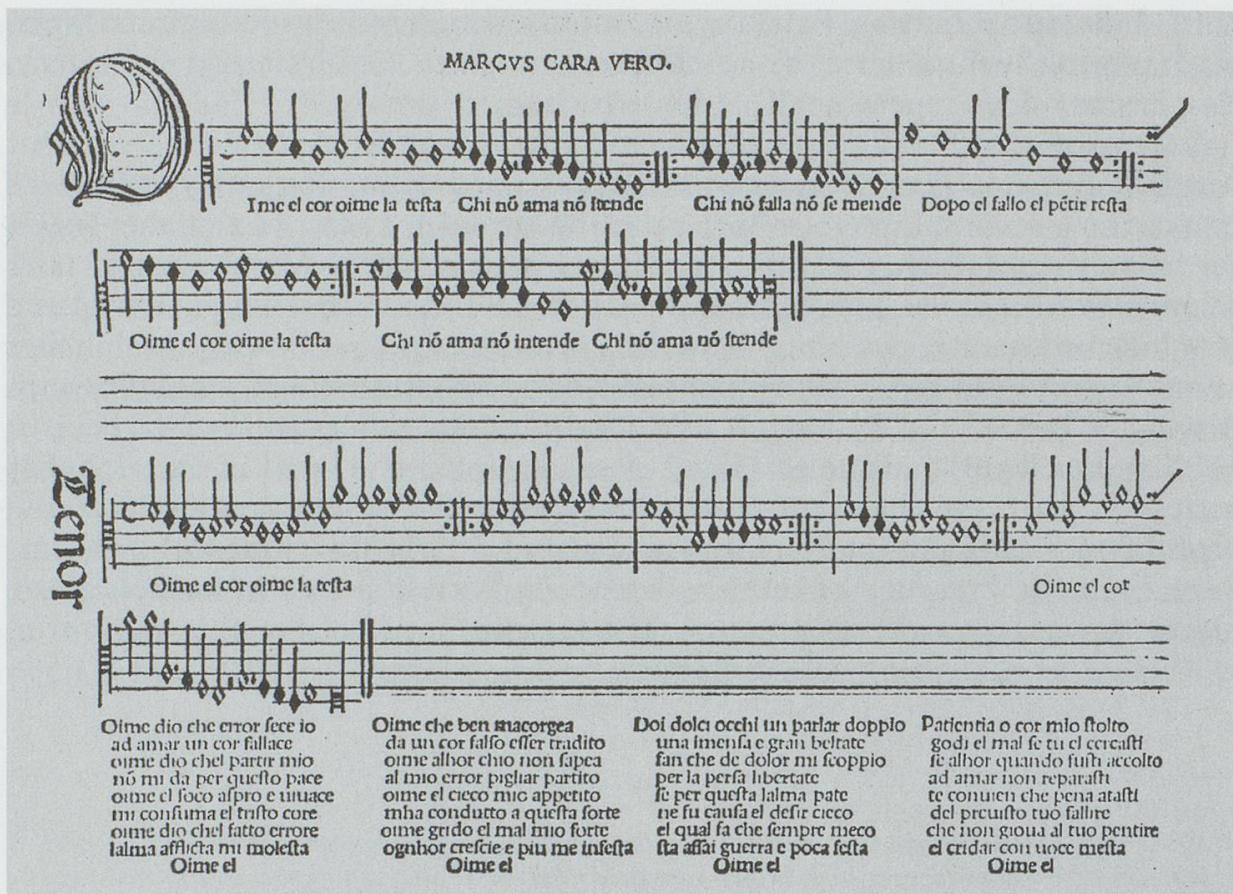


Figure 1: *Frottola Libro Primo*, Venice: Petrucci, 1504, Aii.

### *Petrucci and Memory.*

That Petrucci was aware of the role that memory played in the performance of music is clear by looking at any one of the texted volumes of frottola he published. As the facsimile reproduced in Figure 1 demonstrates, additional text strophes for this Italian song repertory were frequently reproduced by Petrucci at the bottom of the page. On the many occasions, however, when there were numerous strophes of text to be sung to the same music, Petrucci reproduced those additional text strophes elsewhere, even if that meant printing them at the very end of a volume, as he indeed did in his ninth book of frottola published in 1509. Now clearly, regardless of whether the additional strophes were to be found on the same page as the music, on a different page or in a different book altogether, there is no way that the singer could have sung them from the book without having memorized either the music first or the text first. In short, something had to be memorized, and that something was most likely the music.

Repetition of pitch and rhythm, the two components which define a tune or make up a melody, are a lot easier to memorize than a rhyme scheme or syllable count each of which contains different words for every new line, and different lines for every new strophe. Let's face it, how many times have we started singing a strophic song from memory with the words, only to find ourselves

humming along toward the end of that song without the words? Now this is not to say that Renaissance singers didn't memorize song texts. I'm sure they did, especially when those texts were popular and in the singer's native tongue. But I think if a singer was given the choice between memorizing the melody of a well-known song or memorizing the numerous strophes of text that go to that song, he would have chosen the melody, as indeed Gaspar Stocker suggested in his treatise on text underlay, *De Musica Verbali*, wherein he noted on three occasions: „I remember the music, if only I could remember the words.“<sup>25</sup>

That musicians throughout Europe, regardless of whether they were musically literate or not, were more likely to remember a tune than remember the words to that tune is clear not only by the many songtext sheets that survive in German, Dutch, English and Spanish from the sixteenth century (sheets which often specify that the new text should be sung to a specific melody),<sup>26</sup> but also by many Renaissance paintings, woodcuts and engravings which depict singers performing a song by holding in their hand only a song text. Given our time constraints, I will discuss only the iconography, and I will limit my examples to only two.



Figure 2: *Das Gesang der Schlemmer*, woodcut, c. 1530 (Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Inv.-no. XII, 41, 68).

<sup>25</sup> „Numeros memini; si verba tenerem.“ This quotation from Virgil's *Eclogae* (IX, 45) appears in Stocker's treatise in Chapter 2 on the division of music (lines 16–17), in Chapter 4 on the definition of verbal music (line 21) and in Chapter 5 on the division of verbal music (line 16). For a most valuable discussion and edition of this important treatise see Albert C. Rotola, S.J., *Gaspar Stoquerus. De Musica Verbali Libri Duo*, Lincoln and London 1988.

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive catalogue and study of the German songsheets see Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, *Die Liedpublizistik im Flugblatt des 15. Bis 17. Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols., Baden-Baden 1974–1975 (Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana, 60). For a general overview of the songsheet tradition outside of the German-speaking realm see Brednich, *Die Liedpublizistik*, 324–331. On the broadside ballads and chapbooks published in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Tessa Watt, *Cheap print and popular piety, 1550–1640*, Cambridge 1991.



Figure 3: Anonymous after Dirck Barendsz, „The Moralistic Music Group“, oil on canvas, 1615 (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Inv.-no. 5523).

As can be seen in the anonymous German woodcut reproduced in Figure 2, seven men are gathered around one woman, who, prominently featured in the center of the illustration, holds a sheet of paper which carries at least one verse of text with the title *Das Gesang der Schlemmer* (i.e., The song of the glutton). Since five of the men are clearly depicted singing from the song text sheet while the man on the far right looks like he is beating time, it is clear that even a slovenly group of musicians were able to memorize their music and underlay a text at sight; that is to say, in an actual performance situation and not in a printed or written redaction as we, as editors of their music, do today.

Although this picture makes clear that Renaissance singers did indeed memorize music, it is impossible to tell whether a monophonic or polyphonic performance is depicted. However, there is one Dutch painting that suggests polyphony was performed in this manner as well.

This picture, illustrated in Figure 3, is an early seventeenth-century copy of Dirck Barendsz's *Moralistic musical group*, preserved in the Dresden *Gemäldegalerie*. Originally painted around 1560, the painting depicts a performance of Clemens non Papa's four-part chanson „Juvons beau ieu tout en riant“, first published in 1545 by Susato in Antwerp. Although musicologists and art historians have analyzed and discussed this painting, no one has ever noted that the old man in the right background is actually holding a songtext sheet that presents a Dutch contrafactum of the chanson prominently featured in the painting.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Among the several discussions of the painting see especially J. Richard Judson, *Dirck Barendsz, 1535–1599*, Amsterdam 1970, 22, 58–60, 94–95 and 113, as well as his earlier article „Dirck Barentsen“, *Bulletin Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts Bruxelles* 11 (1962) 94–122; and Walter Salmen, *Musikleben in 16. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 1976, 126 and Plate 76.

Like the young woman depicted in the German woodcut, the old man in Barendsz's work holds a long sheet of paper containing verse, rubricated with the title „Een nyen Liedeken,“ thereby implying that the old man holds a songtext in his hand. Secondly, a syllable count of the opening lines of the Dutch text equals a syllable count of the opening lines of the original French text.<sup>28</sup> Finally, among the individuals depicted making music in the picture, it is clear that the old man is singing, that the woman in the center of the painting might be, and that the young man playing the harp is either plucking out one part of the song or realizing an accompaniment to it. As for the woman holding the discant partbook whose back is to us, your guess is good as mine.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the case might be, this painting strongly suggests that a singer of polyphony memorized his music first and then underlaid a text at sight. Moreover, it suggests that he did it in precisely the same way a singer working with Petrucci's frottola volumes would have done for the additional text strophes that were not underlaid or in the same way that a singer working with Petrucci's alphabet series would have done singing from a separate songtext sheet. In conclusion, I cannot see any difference between singing texted songs from texted songbooks and singing texted songs from untexted songbooks when it comes to the issue of performance practice.

#### *Petrucci and performance.*

With only a few minutes left, the time has obviously come for me to wrap up my paper. I was hoping to do this by presenting some new songtext manuscripts or songtext sheets which correspond to the contents of the untexted Petrucci's alphabet series in the same way that I have shown how the songtext manuscripts of the Basel doctor Felix Platter correspond to the untexted songbooks of the Basel goldsmith Jacob Hagenbach.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, I wasn't successful,

<sup>28</sup> The opening two lines of the Dutch text, with eight and seven syllables each respectively, read (not very securely) „Ghy gckek en sr folytan, di erden vr hronis mo.“ This is followed by yet another line that appears to have six syllables: „ok enim Min miet meerr.“ The remaining text on the sheet I cannot read. The original French text of *Juvons*, as set by Clemens, consists of alternating lines of 8 and 7 syllables. A detailed study of this painting and of its implications for performance practice will appear in the author's forthcoming book *Music and Memory in the Renaissance*.

<sup>29</sup> She could be singing. Yet, given the rather naughty subject matter of this Kodak moment, she could be hiding as well; hiding from her husband, her lover, family or simply from the law. Indeed, while this painting is often called the „Moralistic Musical Group,“ H. Colin Slim informed me in a personal correspondence dating from 1991 that it would be more appropriate to name the painting „The prodigal son at the whores.“ I agree with Professor Slim and highly recommend his study *The prodigal son at the whores*, Irvine 1976. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Slim for the many years of advice and encouragement he has given me as a scholar and as a mutual friend of our long-lost leader, Howard Mayer Brown.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Kmetz, „Singing texted songs,“ 121–143 as well as John Kmetz, *The sixteenth-century Basel songbooks. Origins, contents and contexts*, Bern etc. 1995 (Publikationen der Schweizerischen Musikforschenden Gesellschaft, Series II/35) 212–224.

although I must admit that I only seriously looked in German-speaking regions, and only then when I had had time in my business day to do so. However, I do not want to leave you this morning with the impression that such texts might not exist. There are plenty of German songtexts from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that could be sung to the untexted songs printed by Petrucci. The problem, however, is that no documented evidence exists to prove that any one of these octo- or decasyllabic German texts was actually sung to a specific song preserved in Petrucci's ABC series.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, I think it would be worth our while to give at least one of these German texts a listen. I have chosen „Ich gib mir gantz ze wellen dir“ from the Songbook of Clara Hätzlerin.<sup>32</sup> Our singer, Viva Biancaluna Biffi, will sing this German text to Hayne van Ghizighem's „De tous biens plaine“ and Michal Gondko will accompany her on the lute. Viva holds in her hand the same song text sheet that you do, nothing else (see Example 1). If the performance you are about to hear proves anything, it is that when you go to market with an international repertory and you market that repertory to an international client base, anything is possible, anytime, any place. Just make sure have you have some music, some text and some memory, and you know someone who can market all three.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Included among the many German song textbooks that are extant, I would like to bring to your attention particularly that of Clara Hätzlerin, edited by Carl Haltaus in *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin*, Quedlinburg and Leipzig 1840 (Bibliothek der gesammten deutschen National-Literatur von der ältesten bis auf die neuere Zeit, 8). This manuscript, copied around 1470 by the daughter of Bartholomaeus Hätzler, an Augsburg notary public and law clerk, contains dozens of songtexts that could be easily sung to untexted songs found in Petrucci's alphabet series. Aside from the Hätzlerin there is also the *Augsburger Gedichthandschrift* (see Johannes Bolte, „Ein Augsburger Liederbuch von Jahre 1454,“ *Alemannia* 18 (1890) 97–127 and 203–235) and the *Liederbuch der Anna von Köln (um 1500)*, Düsseldorf 1954, edited by Walter Salmen and Johannes Koepp (Denkmäler Rheinischer Musik, 4).

<sup>32</sup> This octosyllabic German songtext is found in the first part of Hätzlerin's songbook and appears as number 51 in the Haltaus edition. Aside from this text, there are several others in the collection that could be sung to Hayne's setting of *De tous bien plaine*. They are numbers 31, 32, 43, 58, 86, 90, and 98.

<sup>33</sup> This German-texted performance of *De tous biens plaine* which closed my presentation was sung to the musical readings of the song's four-voice version printed in the *Odhecaton* (folios 22v–23r) and edited by Helen Hewitt, *Harmonice*, 263–264. The lower three voices were played on a lute and the superius part was sung to the text reproduced in Example 1. We choose to sing the superius part and not the tenor because it was more beautiful and more difficult to memorize.

Although the syllable count and rhyme scheme for each line of the German text does vary from strophe to strophe and as such does not correspond exactly to the octosyllabic rondeau quatrain form of the original French text, the singer had no problem fitting the German text. The only hesitation she had was precisely the same she had when she sang the song in French, namely where exactly does one place each of the eight syllables when a musical line is melismatic. On the other hand, the singer had no problem underlaying the text in French or in German when the musical line supported a syllabic declamation of the text, as the second line of text in each strophe of the German and the French demonstrates.

Example 1. *Ich gib mich ganz* (no. 51) from the *Liederbuch von Clara Häzzlerin*, edited by C. Haltaus.

Ich gib mich ganz ze wellen dir,	8a
Ob allen menschen liebst du mir;	8a
Hett ich gewalt nach meiner gir,	8a
Alles gütten müsst du sein gewert.	9b
Nymm hin von mir die trine mein,	8c
Nach meiner gir bin ich der dein;	8c
Entschliusse dein hertz, nymm mich darein,	9c
So bin ich ganz von dir ernert.	8b
Sich an mein dienst und nymm der war,	8d
Ich leb dir ze willen gar;	7d
Schick mir ze diesem Newen Jar,	8d
Dein gunst, nicht mer mein hertz begert.	8b

