

*Aesthetics of Music  
in Sixteenth-Century  
Germany, the Low  
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Second Edition

AESTHETICS OF MUSIC  
VOLUME 5

David Whitwell



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DAVID WHITWELL

# Aesthetics of Music

VOLUME 5  
AESTHETICS OF MUSIC IN  
SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY,  
THE LOW COUNTRIES AND ENGLAND

EDITED BY CRAIG LABELSTEIN

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# FOREWORD

WE DEFINE MUSIC to be that form of music performed live before listeners. We define Aesthetics in Music to be a study of the nature of the perception of music by the listener.

We believe the performance of music in actual practice falls naturally into four classes. These are Art Music, Educational Music, Functional Music and Entertainment Music.

## I. ART MUSIC

Art Music we believe is defined by four conditions, *all of which must always be present*. These are:

1. *Art music is inspired.* Art music is music in which it seems evident that the composer has made an honest attempt to communicate genuine feelings. Feelings, which may range from lofty and noble to superficial and vulgar, must be presumed to be generally recognizable in music, as they are in any other art form, including painting, sculpture, dance, and architecture. In Art Music, lofty and noble feelings are paramount.

Due to the common genetically understood nature of emotions, it must also be understood that in music emotions or feelings cannot be 'faked.' They will always be recognized as such by any contemplative listener.

2. *Art Music has no purpose other than the communication of its own aesthetic content.* Art Music is free of any purpose or function, save the spiritual communication of pure beauty.
3. *Art Music is that which enjoys a performance faithful to the intent of the composer.*
4. *Art Music must have a listener capable of contemplation.*

If any of these conditions are missing, the performance must result in a lesser aesthetic experience. For example, the *Ninth Symphony* of Beethoven played in a stadium, during the half-time of a professional football game, would fail for the lack of the presence

of Condition Number Four. The same Symphony heard in a concert hall, but in a poor performance, not faithful to the intent of the composer, would fail for the lack of the presence of Condition Number Three.

## II. EDUCATIONAL MUSIC

Educational Music may or may not have the same conditions as Art Music, excepting Condition Number Two; it may or may not occur within an educational institution. Educational Music is didactic music, music which has the specific and *additional* aim to educate. In the strictest sense, if the *primary purpose* of Music is to educate, it cannot be Art Music—for Art Music has no purpose.

## III. FUNCTIONAL MUSIC

Functional Music is music put at the service of something else. We include here, for example, all kinds of religious music, music for weddings, music for the military, and occupational music. Functional Music may share the same conditions as Art Music, excepting Condition Number Two.

One may ask, How can a Mozart Mass be called Functional Music, and not Art Music? If the observer were not contemplatively listening to the music, but were rather contemplating religious thoughts, then the Mozart Mass becomes merely a very high level of Functional Music. If, on the other hand, the observer is a contemplative listener of music, forgetting about religion, then the Mozart Mass is Art Music, but has failed in its purpose as church music.

Military and wedding music are examples of music in which the contemplative listener is missing entirely. How about airport, supermarket and elevator music where there is no listener at all? According to the definition we have given above, recorded music without listeners is not to be considered music at all.

#### IV. ENTERTAINMENT MUSIC

Entertainment Music is music with no object other than to please. It will always be missing Condition Four, the contemplative listener. For this reason, Entertainment Music may be inspired music, but the composer is unlikely to be inspired by lofty and noble emotions, knowing there will be no contemplative listener. Entertainment Music and Art Music can never be the same thing because of Condition Number Two: Art Music has no purpose other than the communication of its own aesthetic content. It is inconsistent with the nature of great art to have any extrinsic purpose, including the purpose to entertain.

The first philosopher to address the impact which Art has on an observer was Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, as part of a discussion of Tragedy, which like music has both a material, written form and a live performance form. In this treatise, Aristotle first considers the nature and contribution of each of the specific components of the written form of the Tragedy in his typically methodical style. His great contribution, however, comes when he has completed this discussion, for he then goes beyond the material form of the play itself to discuss the observer. He makes it clear that not only is the end purpose of the elements of the play to produce a specific experience in the observer, but that the nature of this experience is what distinguishes Tragedy from other dramatic forms, such as Spectacle. It was in this moment that he created a new branch of Philosophy which we call 'Aesthetics.'

Our purpose is to provide a source book of representative descriptions of actual performances, observations by philosophers, poets and other commentators which contribute insights to our understanding of what music meant to listeners during the early Renaissance. It is for this reason that when discussing contemporary treatises on music that we concentrate on those passages which offer insights relative to the aesthetics of music and musical performance rather than the usual technical subjects such as scales, modes and counterpoint which fill most books on Renaissance music.

Since traditional musicology has focused almost exclusively on sacred and secular vocal music of the Renaissance, we have also

included numerous references which we hope will reveal a much wider world of music during this period.

We are also interested in contemporary views on the physiology of knowing, especially with regard to the relationship of the senses and Reason, and related psychological ideas, such as Pleasure and Pain and the Emotions, which might offer a frame of reference for their perspective on the perception of music.

This is the fifth volume in a series of eight, ranging from the music of the ancient civilizations through the Baroque Period.

David Whitwell  
Austin, Texas

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David Whitwell  
Austin, 2013



# 1 THE LOW COUNTRIES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

THE EVIDENCE OF THE STRONG MUSICAL HERITAGE of the Low Countries is most clearly seen in her many distinguished musicians who made careers in other countries. Even a city so relatively distant as Lisbon used only musicians from Flanders in their civic bands between 1495 and 1521.<sup>1</sup> And the same can be said for poets.

We should not forget the role played by the Low Countries humanist-poets who settled in Paris, the most prolific perhaps being Petrus Caecus de Ponte.<sup>2</sup>

The Eighty Years' War, which began in 1568, restricted patronage of the arts somewhat and encouraged more artists to leave. We can sense the negative effects of the political atmosphere during the second half of the century in an observation by Corneille Verdonck (1563–1625), one who stayed behind working for wealthy burghers. In the preface of his chanson collection of 1599, he comments on this scene and worries,

whether these sweet harmonies have been interrupted by the tempests of war [Mars], who has too long been master of these provinces, or whether [music] has ceased to be esteemed by those who, filled with [religious] confusion ... cannot value what is full of agreement and harmony.<sup>3</sup>

The same pessimism is found in another famous native son, Erasmus.

Only in my own country are we still backward, and barbarism, defeated elsewhere, seems to have fled to us as its last refuge. The reason is partly that the court here has not yet learnt to treat good literature with respect; partly the personal pretensions of a few men, who are convinced that humane studies will interfere with the distinction they have hitherto enjoyed among the common herd.<sup>4</sup>

The university created by papal bull in Louvain in 1425 had become a vital humanistic center until the turmoil following Luther somewhat derailed it. In any case we can see by its

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1 George Grove, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), XI, 25.

2 I. D. McFarlane, 'Clément Marot and the World of Neo-Latin Poetry,' in *Literature and the Arts in the Reign of Francis I* (Lexington: French Forum, 1985), 108.

3 Quoted in Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York: Norton, 1959), 398.

4 Letter of Erasmus to Louis Ruzé, Mechelen, 1519, in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), VI, 273.

statutes that it closely followed the model of Paris, with music still firmly tied to mathematics. Further, Erasmus frequently complained that the Catholic conservatives were seeking to diminish the humanities taught in this university.

But in Louvain the trouble has been that the leading men prevent anyone from giving instruction in any humane subject, even without a fee! I cannot tell you how they conspired against something which would be a great benefit and a great credit, not only to the university but to the whole region. An ancient regulation was produced that no one had ever heard of. The authority of the whole university was brought to bear; the protection of the king's court was invoked; lay magistrates were summoned to give aid; finally the police were called in. No stone was left unturned, no expedient untried.<sup>5</sup>

He returns to this topic again in a letter to Cardinal Wolsey in England, in which he mentions that two of the theologians at Louvain 'hate me for the sake of the humanities, of which they are more terrified than of dog or snake.'<sup>6</sup>

## ON THE AESTHETICS OF MUSIC

One of the great men of the Low Countries was Tielman Susato (d. 1561), trombonist,<sup>7</sup> leader of the town wind band in Antwerp and an important publisher. Although he published the first music in the Dutch tongue, his publication of many French chansons point to the close relationships between these two countries. His publications of chansons always carry a phrase indicating that they are suitable to be sung or played any kind of musical instruments, which is a reflection on his days as a member of the Antwerp town band. In the 'Apology' to Susato's 1551 publication of the first music in the Flemish tongue, we find a touching statement on the purpose of music.

Music is a remarkable gift, instituted by order of God and offered to man to be used not for dishonest or thoughtless ends but, above all, to render thanks and praise to the Lord, to shun idleness and make good use of his time, to drive out melancholy and dark thoughts, and in order to restore joy to hearts sorely tried. And wherefore then should this not be done henceforth in our own mother tongue with the same skill and the same harmony as, until now, have been lavished on Latin, French and Italian? Our art and our harmony being the equal of those others, for what reason should one language be scorned to the profit of another?

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5 Letter to Juan Vives [1520], in *Ibid.*, VII, 308.

6 Letter to Thomas Wolsey [1522], in *Ibid.*, IX, 40.

7 Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, 290, incorrectly identifies Susato as a trumpeter.



## ART MUSIC

An occasional reference speaks of the performance of art music in the homes of the nobles residing in the Low Countries. For example, a letter of Paschasius Berselius to Erasmus, in 1518, speaks of ‘feeding my ears on sweet music’ and the guests singing ‘grace to the powers above’ after the tables had been cleared after dinner.<sup>8</sup>

By the sixteenth century virtually all the more prosperous towns in the Low Countries had regularly employed wind bands of at least six members. A document from Ghent, in 1540–1541, provides a standard instrumentation.

Item, paid to Pieter de Coninc, Goldsmith ... for two silver sackbuts, two descant and two tenor shawms ... to be delivered to the six shawm players of the city.<sup>9</sup>

As one finds elsewhere, these players doubled on all the standard instruments. In Ghent, for example, Cornelis Van Winckle was hired in 1542 as a trombonist, but is mentioned in a document of 1552 as having the city’s bombard.

The Antwerp civic wind band enjoyed a large collection of city owned instruments and received uniforms. One of the members of this band was the famous Hans Nagel. Soon after Susato joined this wind band he himself transcribed for it thirty-three volumes of six-part music, running to about four hundred folio pages!<sup>10</sup> His famous instrumental dances, published in four part-books in 1551 are almost certainly taken from the repertoire of this band.<sup>11</sup>

Another town which had a fine wind band was Mechelen, which profited from the presence of the court of Margaret of Austria. An extant contract for these players, from 1505, says they were to play on cornetts and other instruments during solemn masses; they were to perform concerts at the town hall late mornings, every Saturday, Sunday, holiday and on days preceding public festivities and they were to play for civic banquets and could not refuse to participate in any service required by the town. In order to maintain a desirable standard of performance, they were ordered to rehearse together at least twice weekly and to obey a leader.<sup>12</sup> A later contract for Mechelen, in 1568, calls for concerts on Sundays, Holy Days, and feast days.<sup>13</sup>

8 Quoted in *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, V, 258.

9 Ghent, *Stads Rekeningen*, 1540–1541, vol. 246v. Similar documents ordering ‘cases’ (consorts) of instruments exist in great numbers for many of these towns. In general, string instruments are not mentioned until after mid-century.

10 John Murray, *Antwerp in the Age of Platin and Brueghel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 147.

11 As a publisher, Susato’s principal competitor was Pierre Phalèse, who stole much of his music from other editions. It is only due to this plagiarism, that the original dances of d’Estrée (1564) have survived.

12 Robert Wangermeé, *Flemish Music and Society in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1968), 180.

13 Raymond Van Aerde, *Ménestrels Communaux ... à Malines, de 1312 a 1790* (Mechelen, 1911), 39ff.

A contract of the Mons civic band, of 1532, demands the performance of concerts for the citizens twice a day, at eleven o'clock in the morning and at six o'clock in the evening.<sup>14</sup> A similar contract for the Bruges civic wind band requires concerts each Sunday at eleven o'clock in the square in front of the city hall and in the St. Donaes Church after the evening prayer.<sup>15</sup> The repertoire for these concerts was specified as sacred and devotional.

A more informal performance can be seen in an engraving by Lucas Valckenborck called 'Spring Landscape,' of 1587.<sup>16</sup> Here one sees a consort of wind players in a large 'nest,' in a tree, performing in the town square.

While the civic statutes addressed the performances required by the town, much of the actual control of civic performance rested with the civic musician guilds. The by-laws of the Bruges guild for 1534 stipulates fines if a member steals a performance opportunity from a brother member or criticizes a brother's talent. If one accepts a wedding or feast performance, one cannot withdraw to take a job that might pay more without the written permission of the first client.<sup>17</sup>

The by-laws of the Antwerp guild, for 1541, says the members cannot refuse engagements if they are free, cannot make double bookings or cut short performances and must teach dancing.<sup>18</sup>

By 1588, in Mons, new members were now expected to play string instruments, in addition to shawm, cornett and recorder, in the performance of 'such songs as the masters see fit to choose.'<sup>19</sup>

## FUNCTIONAL MUSIC

The most frequently documented public performances by the civic bands of the Low Countries were those associated with a civic-religious celebration called the *ommegang*. These often featured allegorical pageants, as for example those given in Antwerp, 'The Return of Peace and Abundance' (1561), 'The Vicissitudes of all Things Mortal in War and Peace and Richness and Poverty' (1562) and 'The Good and Evil Use of Wealth' (1564).

An earlier *Ommegang*, in 1520, in Antwerp was observed by Albrecht Dürer and is discussed in his diary. He describes hearing 'long old Frankish trumpets of silver,'<sup>20</sup> and in addition,

14 Leopold Devillers, *Essai sur l'histoire de la musique à Mons* (Mons, 1868), 16.

15 Louis Gilliodts-Van Severen, 'Les ménestrels de Bruges,' in *Essais d'Archéologie Brugeoise* (Bruges: L. de Plancke, 1912), II, 134.

16 London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

17 Edmond Vander Straeten, *La Musique aux Pays-Bas* (Brussels, 1867), IV, 96.

18 Murray, *Antwerp in the Age of Platin and Brueghel*, 143ff.

19 Wangermeé, *Flemish Music*, 182.

20 Albrecht Dürer, *Albrecht Dürer, Diary of his Journey to the Netherlands* (Grennwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 60ff.

There were also in the German fashion many pipers and drummers. All the instruments were loudly and noisily blown and beaten.

He describes the procession of the various guilds, including Goldsmiths, Painters, Masons, Sculptors, Joiners, Carpenters, Sailors, Fishermen, Butchers, Leatherers, Clothmakers, Bakers, Tailors and Cordwainers. He was particularly moved to see a group of widows, clad in white, 'very sorrowful to see.' From where he stood, it took two hours for the procession to pass.

The civic musicians were always engaged in the ceremonies welcoming visiting nobles. When Prince Francis, Duke of Brabant visited Antwerp in 1581, an eyewitness records a procession that included twenty thousand knights. Given the size, this observer was surprised by the quiet and orderly nature of the procession.

Why, they made so little noise that if it had not been for the thundering of the cannons, the sounding of the trumpets, clarions, halboies [shawms], and other instruments, there was no more noise than is among a councell of grave men.<sup>21</sup>

Along the procession route were a number of allegorical pageants. The first featured the 'Maiden of Antwerp,' and consisted of 'Concord, Wisedome, and Defense' (a pelican killing herself for her young birds) and 'Offense' (a hen brooding over her chicks). At St. Katharines bridge a triumphal arch was constructed,

cunninglie painted, garnished with His Highnesses armes, and with torches and cressets, and with musick of holboies and clarions.

Here also were torches constructed of barrels of pitch on poles, 'five stories high,' and a great mechanical giant which turned its head to greet the visitors.

Another triumphal arch held the Antwerp civic band, together with the allegorical goddesses Flora, Ceres, and Pomona, together with the 'hellhounds, Discord, Violence and Tyrannie.'

Later in the week another pageant was given, representing the Nine Muses, 'playing on diverse kinds of instruments, and a sweet singer.' Near the musicians was a 'cave, verie hideous, darke, and drierie to behold,' in which lurked the three hell-hounds, Discord, Violence and Tyrannie. These three would come sneaking to the mouth of the cave only to hear the music, which would cause them to scamper back into the cave. This was to instruct all observers that as long as the realm was interested in the arts, it would not be disturbed by discord, violence and tyranny!

When the English Earl of Leicester visited Amsterdam in 1586, an eyewitness reports that not only were there one thousand ships in the harbor, but 'sundry great [mechanical] whales and other fishes of hugeness,' which carried the civic officials who read Latin orations of welcome.<sup>22</sup>

21 John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1788).

22 John Motley, *History of the United Netherlands* (New York, 1860), I, 15ff.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. DAVID WHITWELL is a graduate ('with distinction') of the University of Michigan and the Catholic University of America, Washington DC (PhD, Musicology, Distinguished Alumni Award, 2000) and has studied conducting with Eugene Ormandy and at the Akademie für Musik, Vienna. Prior to coming to Northridge, Dr. Whitwell participated in concerts throughout the United States and Asia as Associate First Horn in the USAF Band and Orchestra in Washington DC, and in recitals throughout South America in cooperation with the United States State Department.

At the California State University, Northridge, which is in Los Angeles, Dr. Whitwell developed the CSUN Wind Ensemble into an ensemble of international reputation, with international tours to Europe in 1981 and 1989 and to Japan in 1984. The CSUN Wind Ensemble has made professional studio recordings for BBC (London), the Köln Westdeutscher Rundfunk (Germany), NOS National Radio (The Netherlands), Zürich Radio (Switzerland), the Television Broadcasting System (Japan) as well as for the United States State Department for broadcast on its 'Voice of America' program. The CSUN Wind Ensemble's recording with the Mirecourt Trio in 1982 was named the 'Record of the Year' by The Village Voice. Composers who have guest conducted Whitwell's ensembles include Aaron Copland, Ernest Krenek, Alan Hovhaness, Morton Gould, Karel Husa, Frank Erickson and Vaclav Nelhybel.

Dr. Whitwell has been a guest professor in 100 different universities and conservatories throughout the United States and in 23 foreign countries (most recently in China, in an elite school housed in the Forbidden City). Guest conducting experiences have included the Philadelphia Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Czech Radio Orchestras of Brno and Bratislava, The National Youth Orchestra of Israel, as well as resident wind ensembles in Russia, Israel, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, England, Wales, The Netherlands, Portugal, Peru, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Canada and the United States.

He is a past president of the College Band Directors National Association, a member of the Praxidium of the International Society for the Promotion of Band Music, and was a member of the found-



ing board of directors of the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (WASBE). In 1964 he was made an honorary life member of Kappa Kappa Psi, a national professional music fraternity. In September, 2001, he was a delegate to the UNESCO Conference on Global Music in Tokyo. He has been knighted by sovereign organizations in France, Portugal and Scotland and has been awarded the gold medal of Kerkrade, The Netherlands, and the silver medal of Wangen, Germany, the highest honor given wind conductors in the United States, the medal of the Academy of Wind and Percussion Arts (National Band Association) and the highest honor given wind conductors in Austria, the gold medal of the Austrian Band Association. He is a member of the Hall of Fame of the California Music Educators Association.

Dr. Whitwell's publications include more than 127 articles on wind literature including publications in *Music and Letters* (London), the *London Musical Times*, the *Mozart-Jahrbuch* (Salzburg), and 39 books, among which is his 13-volume *History and Literature of the Wind Band and Wind Ensemble* and an 8-volume series on *Aesthetics in Music*. In addition to numerous modern editions of early wind band music his original compositions include 5 symphonies.

David Whitwell was named as one of six men who have determined the course of American bands during the second half of the 20th century, in the definitive history, *The Twentieth Century American Wind Band* (Meredith Music).

A doctoral dissertation by German Gonzales (2007, Arizona State University) is dedicated to the life and conducting career of David Whitwell through the year 1977. David Whitwell is one of nine men described by Paula A. Crider in *The Conductor's Legacy* (Chicago: GIA, 2010) as 'the legendary conductors' of the 20th century.

'I can't imagine the 2nd half of the 20th century—without David Whitwell and what he has given to all of the rest of us.' Frederick Fennell (1993)