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Kate van Orden, *Materialities: Books, Readers, and the Chanson in Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xix + 320 pp. Tables, figures, notes, glossary, bibliography, and index. £34.99 U.K. \$55.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 978-0-199-36064-2.

Review by James Helgeson, University of Nottingham.

Kate van Orden's engrossing book takes as its point of departure the material history of early modern (primarily sixteenth-century) music printing. It is a cultural history of the "consumption" of polyphonic music, largely in French-speaking areas, but with remarks about, e.g., Italian, German, Spanish, and British sources. She considers not only the (uncharacteristic) fate of bound, luxury volumes owned by collectors, but also that of ephemeral *feuilles volantes* (here, in essence, "sheet music") used by Renaissance musicians. Van Orden's project is to tease out details from material sources about how musical imprints were used both in everyday music making and in educational practice.

The book's seven chapters span two, somewhat divergent, parts. Van Orden has worked extensively on the history of the Parisian chanson: simple, tuneful, often homophonic settings of short poems by French-language poets of the first half of the century (including well-known writers such as Clément Marot and Maurice Scève). These songs—printed by Pierre Attaignant in Paris in a famous series of collective volumes starting in 1528 and widely disseminated throughout Europe—are central to her interests throughout the book (although other, "higher" forms of musical production appear as well). The second part of the study considers music printing in education and the civilities of courtly, and bourgeois, life. We also learn more here about the ambitious, "higher" status publications including liturgical music in Latin (van Orden calls into question the problematic distinction between "high" and "low" usage, with regards to the Latin motet). This second part divides naturally into two sections that examine education: first in Latin, then in the vernacular.

The first, introductory, chapter situates the study in recent book history, in the vein of Roger Chartier,^[1] reflecting on what a "book" of music is, by contrast, for example, to a poetry collection, and providing background on the particularities of music printing.^[2] In the sixteenth century, music was not distributed, or even usually composed, in full scores, but rather in sets of part-books, rather as if a string quartet only existed as individual parts. There was no score providing the standard synoptic view we have become accustomed to since the seventeenth century. As a result, even "major" works are vulnerable to mutilated transmission or complete loss: flimsy part-books can easily go missing or disintegrate. Other consequences are less obvious, although they are no less significant in studying early modern music making. Volumes binding together all of the part-books for a particular work are not only uncharacteristic but also misleading: they are often luxury compilations made by or for collectors that could not have been used for practical music making without being broken down into their vulnerable constituent elements. Such collective volumes are thus not the most useful sources for studying questions of performance and reception.

The second chapter considers the distribution of printed music, and of *feuilles volantes*, beginning with considerations of part-books by comparison with “rolls”—scrolls from which early modern actors learned their parts—as well as details about how musical part-books passed from hand to hand. Van Orden is adept in choosing modern examples that allow readers an intuitive understanding of sixteenth-century transmission. She uses comparisons to contemporary education (school orchestras and such: perhaps even these are becoming a historical phenomenon, unfortunately), and other practices that, although familiar are no longer contemporary (“Dick and Jane,” adduced in the discussion of primers, p. 123). These comparisons make her arguments more intuitively immediate to her readers without straying into anachronism. Van Orden here analyses in detail surviving inventories of sixteenth-century booksellers and printers, in particular the important Antwerp printer Christopher Plantin (pp. 58-66; see the fascinating table on pp. 63-4).

We move, in chapter three, from analyses of book sales to the practice of publishing collective volumes, beginning with a dismaying anecdote concerning an mid-eighteenth-century hunter who refused to part with his copy of Petrucci’s 1501 *Odhecaton*, coveted by Padre Martini, not because he had any interest in the music but because it could be employed, page by page, to load his gun. Although these volumes do not tell us much about how music was used practically, they do suggest rather a lot about the status of music in relationship to other forms of printed and manuscript transmission. The concerns of this chapter are pan-European: the transmission of French chansons in England, Italy, and Germany. Van Orden considers sixteenth-century book-collectors who were, she writes, primarily “magistrates, jurists, and ecclesiastics, which is to say those who made their careers with the pen and the word” (p. 69). She suggests, in passing, that traditional literary history privileging the high-status production, for example, of Pierre de Ronsard and the poets of Pléiade, skews our picture of what people in the later sixteenth century were, in fact, reading (chivalric romances, François Villon...) at least if we take the inventories of collectors’ libraries as an indication. Given the great detail often provided about individual music printers, and the implications of her view for literary historians, more detailed breakdowns would be needed here. We are referred to Andrew Pettegree, an excellent source, to be sure, but the footnote is very brief.[3] Further remarks on the status of luxury volumes contained in State collections, such as the tome containing Attaignant’s books 1-35, now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, follow; van Orden has interesting things to say about the relative paucity of the musical holdings of the French Bibliothèque nationale, by comparison with other prestigious collections.

The goal of the second half of the study is “to consider books and music for less-accomplished readers. This public made up the broadest market for print, and in the broadsheets, pamphlets, and books designed to appeal to them, we can see how authors and printers attracted new readers for their wares by accommodating texts to the reading practices of the marginally literate” (p. 125). In chapters four and five, van Orden connects the ways sixteenth-century children of many social strata were taught to read both letters and musical notation. This chapter considers, in particular, Latin literacy, starting from Erasmus’s recommendations in his 1528 *De recta pronuntiatione*, showing how the practice of learning letters in Latin and, more generally, Latin prosody, dovetailed surprisingly with the oral teaching of rudimentary musical literacy (for example, through the use of the chants associated with familiar prayers such as the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*). Van Orden suggests that “the use of these pieces to regulate a child’s first concentrated experiences of reading witness not simply of the Church’s control of reading as an element of acculturation but the predominantly vocal culture of rituals, sermons, feast-day processions, and meal-time prayers that operated around these textual artefacts” (p. 126).

Chapter five continues along this line, considering the indoctrinating function of musical texts, examining the relationship between learning to read in Latin and religious indoctrination. Van Orden starts by pointing out the relationship between “primers” (linked etymologically with the canonical hour, *prime*) and the books of hours which were the books early modern French readers were most likely to own, suggesting intriguingly that polyphonic works, such as the beautiful Certon six-part simultaneous setting of the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*, transcribed in part on pp. 153-4 (more of it, please!), far from being

works only available to highly educated, literate readers, were in fact instructional works used to introduce children to the rudiments of reading both music and letters.

Chapter six examines the goal of “civility” in education, which dovetailed with the training of musical literacy in France; considering, in a fascinating section, the elegant “caractères de civilité” devised by Robert Granjon in the 1550s both for printing and music. It looks at the Parisian four-part *chanson* and the ways readers and singers became acquainted with its characteristic musical vocabulary. Music has a strong ideological function in the shaping not only of religious belief but also forms of public interaction. Van Orden looks at collective music making as a civilising social practice; this interest in the formative function of music has been a constant concern of hers.^[4] The line of argument about the ideological function of musical education is carried over into chapter seven. Here, Guillaume Boni’s moralising 1582 *Quatrains du Sieur de Pybrac*, which were set to simple polyphony, as well as their musical fortunes into seventeenth century, are examined in considerable detail.

The study is characteristic of Kate van Orden’s subtle, erudite negotiations between literary history and music history. It is full of insights relevant not just to musicologists but to anyone interested in the history of books in the early modern period. It navigates impressively between reflections likely to engage literary historians and explanations of musical material made accessible, with exemplary clarity and without simplification, to non-musicians. The examples, musical as well as visual and literary, are well chosen and analysed.

This said I have several comments and hesitations. First, a minor one about book production: I looked at this book in its well-produced material version and also in its (nearly as expensive) Kindle version: the latter is not particularly easy to use and has some production glitches (although the handsome illustrations are serviceably rendered), most strikingly the baffling systematic substitution of “jpgt” for the word “gift.” I worried, momentarily, that this was a bit of jargon deemed too obvious for explanation, before working out the mistake. Surely such an expensive electronic edition could be produced with more care.

More substantially: the mental demands of constructing polyphony without the benefit of a score seem an excellent place to start a more cognitively-based study of the production and reception of early modern music, since the demands of this type of production are very different than those of writing and playing music in scores (novice musicians can begin to get some idea of the ways this might work by realising a simple round like “Frère Jacques” in the head, noting perhaps the contrapuntal infelicity of its parallel unisons). I would have found considerations that went more in this direction very useful.

I also had a few hesitations related to literary history. For an early modern literary scholar, several statements need stronger development: for example, the assertions, mentioned earlier, concerning the publicity, or lack thereof, provided to the early Attaignant publications by the inclusion (of now-canonical) writers such as Clément Marot. Similarly, the reference to Mireille Huchon’s polemical book on Louise Labé takes her conclusions for granted; van Orden puts this case in direct parallel with that of Barthélemy Beaulaigue, a precocious (and apparently non-existent) mid-century teenage motet composer from Marseille.^[5] There has been much disagreement about how convincing Huchon’s argument is. While it is too easy to defend (just as unconvincingly) the case of Labé’s existence, for reasons of political commitment, Huchon’s argument has seemed, to many, far from compelling. Such details are usefully provocative; far from putting off literary scholars, they will spur them to engage in greater detail with van Orden’s analysis in this exceptionally rich study.

NOTES

[1] See, e.g., Roger Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France de l’ancien régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

[2] “‘Livre,’ ‘liber,’ and ‘libro’ were terms used by printers to title serial publications, but as physical objects, a single “book” of music printed in part-books consisted of a number of smaller, pamphlet-sized parts that were no match, physically, for other sorts of books from the age” (p. 18).

[3] Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010); *The French Book and the European World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[4] See, e.g., her *Music, Discipline, and Arms in Early Modern France* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[5] Mireille Huchon, *Louise Labé. Une créature de papier* (Geneva: Droz, 2006). For an insightful discussion of Huchon’s study and the question of authenticity, see Corinne Noirot, “L’œuvre de Louise Labé est-elle devenue inauthentique ? Et alors ?” in Carole Talon-Hugon and Alexandre Gefen, eds. Special issue of *Noesis* (“Éthique et esthétique de l’authenticité”) 22-23 (2015): 153-67.

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