

# Louise Hanson-Dyer's commonplace book of early music theory

Jason Stoessel

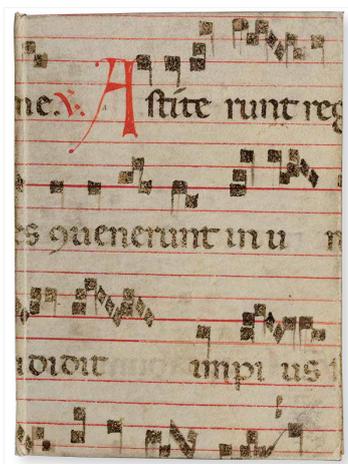
After more than a century of university-based musicology, it is very rare for an early music theory manuscript—especially one in an Australian collection—to step figuratively onto the limelight and transform our understanding of music history. Yet Manuscript 244 in the Hanson-Dyer Collection at the University of Melbourne (hereafter LHD 244) has done just that. Purchased from antiquarian bookseller H.W. Belmore in Rome by Louise Hanson-Dyer in 1929,<sup>1</sup> and later part of a generous bequest to the university, LHD 244 offers precious insights into late medieval and early modern musical culture.<sup>2</sup>

In 2014, my colleagues and I formed a consortium of experts to investigate this unique volume. At the beginning of this process, we had many questions about this source, including fundamental ones like its origin, owners, purpose and significance. I am pleased to report that several of these questions were recently answered. On 29 May 2015, seven members of the consortium presented new findings on LHD 244 during a one-day symposium: 'Challenges and conundrums: New research on a little known music theory manuscript at the University of Melbourne', held in the Baillieu Library.<sup>3</sup> Kerry Murphy (Melbourne

Conservatorium of Music) and Richard Excell (University of Melbourne) spoke first on the legacy of Louise Hanson-Dyer and the discovery of LHD 244. Distinguished music theorists Jan Herlinger (University of Alabama and Louisiana State University) and Linda Page Cummins (University of Alabama) respectively described the oldest part of the manuscript and examined the modern reception of Nicolaus de Capua, one of the authors represented in LHD 244. Carol Williams (Monash University) described the contents and raised important questions about the context that gave rise to Nicolaus de Aversa's unique treatise. Denis Collins (University of Queensland) placed the later treatises in LHD 244 in the context of other late 16th- and early 17th-century Italian treatises on figured bass. I presented an overview of a detailed study of the manuscript's construction and its many scribes. The remainder of this article outlines some of these findings.<sup>4</sup>

As a physical object, LHD 244 is simply decorated and small by most standards (13.8×10.5 cm; 118 paper pages). It is a practical book that avoids philosophical questions about music, in preference to furnishing practical knowledge useful for the performance and creation of

music.<sup>5</sup> These and other pieces of evidence point to its being used as a portable teaching reference, as a commonplace book of rudimentary music theory into which various treatises, or quite often portions of them, were copied for future reference. Significantly, it was used and added to for up to 150 years, thus providing insights into continuities in musical pedagogy from the late 15th to the early 17th century. The placement of the Guidonian hand (illustrated on p. 35), a rudimentary *aide-mémoire* used for sight-singing, at the beginning of the book gives a strong clue to the nature of much of the material that follows.<sup>6</sup> Right up until the 17th century, young singers were taught to use overlapping sequences of vocables *ut-re-mi-fa-sol-la*, which together formed a hexachord, to sight-sing notated music. The hand, named for the medieval music theorist Guido of Arezzo, helped students to learn the location of 'joints' between different hexachords in the medieval scale. For example, the first joint at the bottom of the index figure could be sung *fa* in the lowest hexachord, which starts at the tip of the thumb, or *ut* for the second hexachord that continues right along the lowest joints of the hand before moving up the little finger.



Cover of assembled manuscript with title page  
*Regole del canto fermo, e di sonare sopra la parte  
 l'organo.* LHD 244, Hanson-Dyer Collection,  
 Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Rare  
 Collections, University of Melbourne Library.

Significantly, LHD 244 contains a previously unknown treatise on singing plainchant, compiled 'from many masters' by the late 14th-century Celestine monk Nicolaus de Aversa. Until the discovery of LHD 244, Nicolaus' reputation had rested upon an anonymous treatise on polyphonic music notation that portrayed him as an innovative composer of polyphony.<sup>7</sup> Surprisingly, his newly discovered plainchant treatise is rudimentary and mentions none of the complexities of late 14th-century polyphonic composition or music notation.

The oldest section of LHD 244 also contains a third, but incomplete, concordance of Nicolaus de Capua's *Compendium musicale*, which states that it was assembled in 1415, as well as some extracts from Nicolò Burzio's *Musices opusculum*, published in Bologna in 1487.<sup>8</sup> This curious concentration of authors with the same first name has led some members of the consortium to dub LHD 244 the 'Nicolaus manuscript', although the coincidence can be attributed more to the circumstances of the manuscript copying than to any intentional design by its compilers. Further additions—several more than are recognised in Herlin's published catalogue—are even more tantalising. Some are by known authors, others

unknown, but all await careful evaluation and editing.<sup>9</sup>

Another discovery is a treatise on counterpoint, which, although it occurs towards the end of LHD 244 and after 16th-century material, is from the end of the 15th century at the latest. The treatise *Nouem sunt consonantie in contraponto* [sic] describes a style of counterpoint that was current in European polyphony from c. 1430 to c. 1480.<sup>10</sup> It provides a short musical example in three parts—a rare occurrence in this period, during which two-part counterpoint was the dominant compositional model—that affirms the author's connection with an English-influenced style of counterpoint found, for example, in the song *Tout a par moy* composed by either the Englishman Walter Frye or the greatest continental emulator of the English style, Gilles Binchois.<sup>11</sup> Notable features (illustrated on p. 37) include all voices being consonant with each other; a low contratenor part (marked *Contra*); and an octave-leap cadence in the contratenor at the end. The tenor voice has a pedagogic quality, using a simple ascending and descending hexachord on G.

In around 1600, several manuals on musical practices were added to LHD 244's 15th-century content. Of interest is a treatise for playing

additional parts on an organ above a bass voice, which is entitled *Modo di sonare sopra la parte con facilità* (Manner of playing above a part with ease). This type of treatise marks a recent development in the musical culture of Europe, during which organs were increasingly used to add harmonies to existing melodies, and more instruments were tolerated in sacred musical spaces. The treatise includes a drawing of an organ (see p. 36) in which the lowest keys form a short octave, which fits the diatonic notes of an octave into the space of six, rather than eight, white keys, by using the lowest white key for C rather than for E, and the two lowest black keys for D and E rather than for F sharp and G sharp. This configuration was common on 16th-century Italian instruments.<sup>12</sup>

In books that were copied and finished in a relatively short amount of time, it is common to find gatherings or quires throughout with the same number of leaves and similar preparation of writing areas with ruled lines and margins. Yet this is not the case for LHD 244. Beyond the more recent binding and endpapers, ten gatherings can be identified. These range in size from a bifolio (two leaves in the gathering) to a damaged gathering of 12 leaves (but the 12th leaf has

been torn out). What is more, a gap in its reconstructed foliation shows that between its completion shortly after 1600 and purchase by Louise Hanson-Dyer, the manuscript lost 32 leaves, several of which undoubtedly included content from the earliest phases of copying.

Up to five different kinds of paper were used in the manuscript, a situation that, again, was not unusual in the 15th and 16th centuries. The oldest gathering (gathering 3) contains parts of watermarks similar to others that can be dated to the last quarter of the 15th century, originating in centres like Florence (1465) or Venice (1481).<sup>13</sup> Two later gatherings (8 and 9) use a type of paper whose watermark can be precisely matched to that used by Jacob von Baden in 1492.<sup>14</sup> Yet the preparation of writing areas in these gatherings, with 20 lines of text per page, as opposed to 28 lines per page in earlier gatherings, makes them distinct from the rest of the manuscript.

Up to 11 different scribes contributed to LHD 244, four of them to the oldest section, including a scribe who copied counterpoint treatises now found at its end. Three of these scribes use an old-fashioned Gothic (*semitextualis*) script that became increasingly rare in music





theory manuscripts over the course of the 15th century, but which continued to be used in chant books well into the 17th century. Two later

scribes used a cursive script that can be associated with the pattern books of master writer Ludovico Curione, who was active in Rome in the two

decades before 1600.<sup>15</sup> A point of great significance is that these and another scribe copied several texts that have connections with Franciscan liturgy, thereby indicating that Franciscans used LHD 244 at the very least during the last quarter of the 16th century.<sup>16</sup>

The final phase in LHD 244's compilation occurred after it came into the possession of an Augustinian friar, who added treatises on harmonising an existing voice and on interval species, foliated the manuscript and added a title page. Importantly, this scribe's title page recognises the value of the earlier treatises for teaching plainchant singing, and refers to the *Modo di sonare sopra la parte* treatise, which he had copied. This scribe's religious affiliation is also indicated by the removal or obscuring of some of the earlier Franciscan content. Facing pages containing a Franciscan chant dateable to after 1482, for example, are pasted together.<sup>17</sup> There are strong indications, the details of which will be revealed elsewhere, that an Augustinian house in Calabria, Italy, owned the manuscript by the early 17th century. Such a fate for a Franciscan book is not unprecedented.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of our consortium's efforts, LHD 244 is less of a mystery today than before. It is an Italian

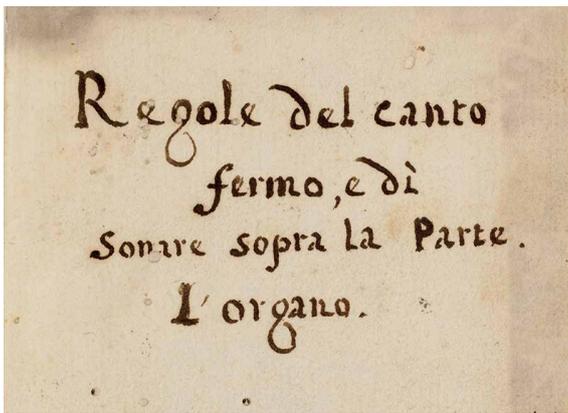
manuscript started in the last quarter of the 15th century, which religious music teachers probably used as a handbook for rudimentary musical instruction. Since this small commonplace book could be easily slipped into a pocket, LHD 244 was likely carried from place to place and continued to be used and augmented until the early 17th century, at which time the rapid developments in European music may have consigned it to the back of a cupboard, only to be rediscovered centuries later. Investigations into the more recent provenance of the manuscript are continuing, but Australia now has an Italian manuscript of later medieval and early modern music theory, a rare and precious addition to the global discipline of musicology.

Dr Jason Stoessel (PhD, 2003) is a musicologist in the School of Arts, University of New England, Australia. He is a specialist in 14th- and 15th-century music, with a broad array of research and teaching interests in other periods of music and musical cultures. He currently holds an ARC Discovery grant (2015–17) with Dr Denis Collins, which promises the first historical account of canonic techniques and musical change from the 14th to 16th centuries.

The Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library is located on Levels 2 and 3, ERC Building, University of Melbourne, see <http://library.unimelb.edu.au/lhdml> or contact [lhdmusic-library@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lhdmusic-library@unimelb.edu.au).



Title page of LHD 244 (detail), added by the last scribe to contribute to the manuscript, an Augustinian friar.



- 1 The proprietor of the bookshop on the via del Babuino, Rome, was Herbert William Belmore (1893–1978), who in 1921 changed his surname from Blumenthal. Born in South Africa and raised in Germany, he was friend and correspondent to Walter Benjamin until their falling out in 1917, and author of a well-known book on the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke. See Leonard Forster, 'Herbert William Belmore 1893–1978', *German Life and Letters*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1979, p. 186.
- 2 LHD 244 is listed in the published catalogue with only nine items identified, some incorrectly; see Denis Herlin, *Catalogue of the Hanson-Dyer Music Collection, the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, 2006, p. 103. Cummins, Herlinger and Stoessel have identified at least 20 items to date. Richard Excell noted that 'A number of items in this manuscript are unusual or indeed unique, and await serious scholarly investigation'. (Richard Excell, 'Bowerbird to L'Oiseau-Lyre: The Hanson-Dyer Collection at the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library, the University of Melbourne', *Fontes Artis Musicae*, vol. 55, no. 3, July–September 2008, p. 351.) I thank Mr Excell for sharing his notes and insights on LHD 244 during an early phase of this study. Hanson-Dyer's time in Italy is described in Jim Davidson, *Lyrebird rising: Louise Hanson-Dyer of Oiseau-Lyre, 1884–1962*, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, 1994, pp. 161–2.
- 3 I take the opportunity here to offer sincerest thanks to Professor Kerry Murphy for supporting a symposium on LHD 244, to the University Library for hosting the event and the symposium participants for their respective contributions. Dr Jennifer Hill, curator of the music collections, and Mr Tim Daly were instrumental in ensuring the day ran smoothly.
- 4 A collection of essays by consortium members is forthcoming in an international music periodical.
- 5 On some of the reforms in medieval music theory during the 15th century, see Stefano Mengozzi, *The Renaissance reform of medieval music theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- 6 Karol Berger, 'The Guidonian hand', in Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski (eds), *The medieval craft of memory: An anthology of texts and pictures*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, pp. 71–82.
- 7 C. Matthew Balensuela (ed.), *Ars cantus mensurabilis mensurata per modos iuros*, Greek and Latin Music Theory, no. 10, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, pp. 215–16, 240–1, 246–9; Carla Vivarelli, 'Ars cantus mensurabilis mensurata per modos iuris: Un trattato napoletano di Ars subtilior?', in Francesco Zimei (ed.), *L'ars nova italiana del Trecento VII: 'Dolce nuove note'*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2009, pp. 103–42.
- 8 On the discovery of the second extant copy of the *Compendium musicale*, see Jan W. Herlinger and Linda Page Cummins, 'The *Compendium musicale ... per presbyterium Nicolaum de Capua ordinatum*: A new text', *Il Saggiatore Musicale*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2008, pp. 5–32. Nicolò Burzio's 1487 Bologna edition is translated in Nicolaus Burtius, *Musices opusculum*, trans. Clement A. Miller, *Musicological Studies and Documents*, no. 37, Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hansler-Verlag, 1983. For the most recent contribution to Burzio's biography, see Russell E. Murray, 'New documentation concerning the biography of Nicolò Burzio', *Studi Musicali*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1995, pp. 263–82.
- 9 Herlin, *Catalogue of the Hanson-Dyer Music Collection*, p. 103.
- 10 This treatise is not listed in Klaus-Jürgen Sachs, *Der Contrapunctus im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zum Terminus, zur Lehre und zu den Quellen*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft, no. 13, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974.
- 11 *Tout a par moy* was recently edited in David Fallows (ed.), *Secular polyphony, 1380–1480*, *Musica Britannica*, no. 97, London: Stainer and Bell, 2014, pp. 92–3.
- 12 On the short octave, see Edward L. Kottick, *A history of the harpsichord*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003, *passim*; Alexander Silbiger, 'Performance practice', in Alexander Silbiger (ed.), *Keyboard music before 1700* (2nd edn), New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 353–4.
- 13 Charles-Moïse Briquet, *Les filigranes: Dictionnaire historique de marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600* (4 vols), vol. 1, Paris: Alphonse Picard et fils, 1907, pp. 223 (#3370) and 224 (#3379). Also see Briquet online, [www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/\\_scripts/php/BR.php](http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/_scripts/php/BR.php).
- 14 Gerhard Piccard, *Die Wasserzeichenkartei im Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart* (17 in 25 vols), vol. 12, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961–97, p. 170 (#1203). Also see Piccard print online, [www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/\\_scripts/php/PPO.php?vol=12](http://www.ksbm.oeaw.ac.at/_scripts/php/PPO.php?vol=12).
- 15 Ludovico Curione, *La notomia delle cancellaresche corsive, et altre maniere di lettere di Lodovico Curione* (2 vols), Rome, 1586 and 1588; Ludovico Curione, *Il cancelliere di Ludovico Curione ornato di lettere corsive et d'altre maniere di caratteri usati a scriuersi in Italia*, Rome: Libre Quarto, 1609.
- 16 These and further findings will be detailed in my forthcoming article, 'The making of Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library Manuscript 244'.
- 17 The chant is *Sancti Francisci floret hortulus*, first Vespers antiphon for the Common of Franciscan saints. See Clemens Blume and Guido Maria Dreves (eds), *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, XXIV: *Historiae Rhythmicae*, no. 4, Leipzig: O.R. Reisland, 1896, p. 8. The melody, which has been photographed with a light sheet behind, is not that found in Eliseo Bruning (ed.), *Cantuale Romano-Seraphicum*, Paris: Typis Societatis S. Iohannis Evangelistae; Desclée, 1951, no. 203. I offer my warm thanks to Mr Anthony Tedeschi, former curator of rare books in the Baillieu Library, for his assistance in photographing these, and to John Stinson for his assistance in dating this chant.
- 18 S.J.P. Van Dijk, 'Some manuscripts of the earliest Franciscan liturgy', *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 16, 1956, pp. 60–99.