Isaac's Signature

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For Giovanni Zanovello

The history of Renaissance music comes to us with a rich and colorful cast of characters, a fraternity of composers whose lives have left us numerous stories to add drama and color to our undergraduate survey courses. The stories are, of course, only too familiar. Jacob Obrecht, to name just one case, is known to have embezzled money and to have neglected his choirboys to the point that they contracted a contagious skin disease.[1] Antoine Busnoys beat up a priest and had him beaten up by others, up to five times, until blood was shed. Nicolas Gombert committed an act upon one of his choirboys that is described in the Latin report as *stuprum*, a word that is perhaps best left untranslated here. Jacobus Clemens non Papa, according to a letter discovered only a few years ago, spent much of his days in a drunken stupor and was said to lead a dissolute life. Bartolomeo Tromboncino murdered his wife; Carlo Gesualdo,

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[1] For this and the following examples, see Rob C. Wegman, *Born for the Muses: The Life and Masses of Jacob Obrecht* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 82–85 and 133–38; Pamela F. Starr, "Rome as the Centre of the Universe: Papal Grace and Music Patronage," *Early Music History* 11 (1992): 223–62; Clement A. Miller, "Jerome Cardan on Gombert, Phinot, and Carpentras," *Musical Quarterly* 58 (1972): 412–19; Henri Vanhulst, "Clemens non Papa 'grant yvroigne et mal vivant' (1553)," *Beyond Contemporary Fame: Reassessing the Art of Clemens non Papa and Thomas Crecquillon*, ed. Eric Jas (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 17–25; William F. Prizer, *Courtly Pastimes: The Frottole of Marchetto Cara*, Studies in Musicology, 33 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 55–61; Angelo Borzelli, *Successi tragici et amorosi* (Naples: F. Casella, 1908); Richard Sherr, "Ceremonies for Holy Week, Papal Commissions, and Madness (?) in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome," *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood*, ed. Jessie Ann Owens and Anthony M. Cummings (Warren,MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), 391–403.

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much later, did the same to his spouse, except he went a step further by also murdering her lover. Josquin was said to be a difficult person to get along with, Carpentras lapsed into debilitating insanity, and although I hate to admit it, Alexander Agricola's music is at times so bizarre as to make one wonder about the state of his mental health.[2]

If we view Isaac in the context of this motley company, the first thing that must strike us about him is how utterly normal he was. It is exactly as the famous letter by Gian di Artiganova says.[3] Isaac is good-natured. He is easy to get along with. He is very rapid in the art of composition, and obligingly he will write new compositions—*when asked.* Isaac makes for a faithful and dependable servant, and will be happy to work at Ferrara for a very reasonable salary—not like some people we could mention. And consider the rest of his life. Although he was a Fleming, few musicians from the Netherlands could have adjusted more successfully to the political and social minefield that was his adopted home town, Florence.[4] He married into a Florentine family, bought a house, and became a respectable tax-paying citizen. Above all, people not only in Florence but everywhere else genuinely liked his music.[5] There are no indiscretions that we have found, no missteps, no history of fights, reprimands, or violent crimes, no mental instability or other afflictions, no skeletons in the closet. The man is clean as a whistle.

All this seems a little disconcerting. After all, is the Renaissance not supposed to be the period that discovered the concept of the creative genius?[6] And as part of that concept, did people not only tolerate but positively expect artists to engage in bizarre and eccentric behavior?[7]

[2] If I had to single out one setting by Agricola to illustrate the point, it would be the Gloria of his *Missa Je ne demande*, which exhibits the most wayward and fitful counterpoint I have encountered in the cyclic Mass repertoire of the Renaissance.

[3] Lewis Lockwood, "Josquin at Ferrara: New Documents and Letters," *Josquin des Prez: Proceedings of the International Josquin Festival-Conference . . . New York, 21–25 June 1971* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 103–36, and idem, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400–1505* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 202–7; David Fallows, *Josquin*, Collection "Épitome musical" (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 235–39.

[4] Frank A. D'Accone, "Heinrich Isaac in Florence: New and Unpublished Documents," *Musical Quarterly* 49 (1963): 464–83; Giovanni Zanovello, "'Master Arigo Ysach, Our Brother': New Light on Isaac in Florence, 1502–17," *Journal of Musicology* 25 (2008): 287–317.

[5] See for example the contemporary appraisals published in Bonnie J. Blackburn, "Lorenzo de' Medici, a Lost Isaac Manuscript, and the Venetian Ambassador," *Musica Franca: Essays in Honor of Frank A. D'Accone*, ed. Irene Alm, Alyson McLamore, and Colleen Reardon (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1996), 19–44; and Blake Wilson, "Heinrich Isaac among the Florentines," *Journal of Musicology* 23 (2006): 97–152.

[6] The classic treatment of this topic is Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963).

[7] See, for example, Wegman, "'And Josquin Laughed . . .': Josquin and the Composer's Anecdote in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Musicology* 17 (1999): 319–57.

Is that not what we secretly admire about Josquin—that he was difficult to get along with, that he demanded an outrageous salary, and that he would *not* compose when asked, but only when the fancy took him? In fact, the very letter by Gian de Artiganova quoted above juxtaposes Isaac with Josquin in a way that somehow suggests that the former was a kind of old-style craftsman, a man who went about his business in a solid, plodding, unassuming kind of way. Isaac was to Josquin, it seems, what Haydn was to Mozart—a man who had no trouble adjusting to feudal conditions of service that proved intolerable to a more independent, free-spirited modern composer. Or so one would like to imagine.

The image is, of course, misleading. If we are to do justice to Isaac, it will be necessary to contemplate his accomplishment from the vantage point of the world in which he lived. The first thing to note about that world is how challenging it was for professional musicians precisely during Isaac's lifetime. As I have argued elsewhere, one could justifiably characterize the period with the metaphor of a *crisis* of music.[8] Isaac experienced that crisis firsthand in his own Florence, when the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola took control of the town in 1494, and all forms of polyphonic church music were outlawed at his instigation—effectively casting singers like Isaac on the streets.[9] In the final decades of the fifteenth century, respectability for the trade of singers, for the counterpoint they sang, or for the compositions they wrote, could no longer be taken for granted. The merits of polyphony, or the lack thereof, were the subject of vehement ongoing debate. For professional musicians there was no choice but to accept that the world around them was changing rapidly and that they had no option but to try to make the best of those conditions. No composer managed to adjust so rapidly and felicitously to those changing conditions as Heinrich Isaac. By the standards of his own time, in fact, he was an extraordinarily successful composer. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the story of his life virtually defined what it meant to be a successful composer for the foreseeable future.

Much of that story has been known for a long time, of course, and need not be rehearsed at length. But two points are worth recalling. First, one challenge faced by composers in this period was to find a way to assert their line of work as a full-blown profession in its own right—not just something they did on the side, but a professional vocation that

[8] Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: Routledge, 2005; paperback ed. 2007).

[9] For the relevant documentation, see Frank A. D'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the 15th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961): 346–49; idem, "The Musical Chapels at the Florentine Cathedral and Baptistry during the First Half of the 16th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24 (1971): 1–50.

entitled them to the respect of society. Their success in accomplishing this is remembered as the "birth of the composer."[10] Interestingly, it is not Josquin, not Obrecht, or any other leading figure, but rather Isaac who was the first to be officially styled "composer" in administrative documents from the early 1480s.[11] Also, it was Isaac who was the first to find a permanent paid position as a composer, at the court of Maximilian I in 1497.[12] In fact, the very position of "court composer" seems to have been created specially for him.

A second challenge for composers was to find a way to assert the inherent worth of the product they made, and to express that worth in terms that society could respect—its market value. Before Isaac's generation, music was copied and circulated freely in what can best be described as a gift economy.[13] But around 1500 there are clear signs that compositions began to change hands, or to be commissioned, in transactions that involved money. Thereby they underwent a subtle but significant transfer from the public domain to the market—another important cultural development, one remembered as the commodification of the musical work.[14] Significantly, the first documented example of that commodification concerns Isaac: he signed a contract to make and deliver the product we now know as the *Choralis Constantinus* for a sum of money agreed in advance.[15]

This, I suspect, is what lies behind Artiganova's implication that Isaac, unlike Josquin, will compose when asked. The key to Isaac's success, it seems, is that he took an utterly professional view of his business.

[10] Wegman, "From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450–1500," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49 (1996): 409–79.

[11] For the relevant documents, see Martin Staehelin, *Die Messen Heinrich Isaacs*, Publikationen der schweizerischen musikforschenden Gesellschaft, II/28, 3 vols. (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1977), 2:19. The same Innsbruck record in which Isaac is called a composer in the early 1480s also uses the term in 1483, apparently in reference to Arnold Schlick: "Arnolden, Componisten, am Erltag vor Ruperti durch Bevelch der Rät von Gnaden wegen," in Walter Senn, *Musik und Theater am Hof zu Innsbruck: Geschichte der Hofkapelle vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zu deren Auflösung im Jahre 1748* (Innsbruck: Österreichische Verlagsanstalt, 1954), 10.

[12] Senn, *Musik und Theater*, 46–47.

[13] Wegman, "Musical Offerings in the Renaissance," *Early Music* 33 (2005): 425–37.

[14] Literature on this topic is vast. See, among others, Hansjörg Pohlmann, *Die Frühgeschichte des musikalischen Urheberrechts, ca. 1400–1800: Neue Materialien zur Entwicklung des Urheberrechtsbewußtseins der Komponisten*, Musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten, 20 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962); Patricia Carpenter, "The Musical Object," *Current Musicology* 5 (1967): 56–87; Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Peter Cahn, "Zur Vorgeschichte des 'Opus perfectum et absolutum' in der Musikauffassung um 1500," *Zeichen und Struktur in der Musik der Renaissance*, ed. Klaus Hortschansky, Musikwissenschaftliche Arbeiten, 28 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 11–26.

[15] Staehelin, *Die Messen Heinrich Isaacs*, 2:65–68; David J. Burn, "*The Mass-Proper Cycles of Henricus Isaac: Genesis, Transmission, and Authenticity*" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2002), and Burn, "What Did Isaac Write for Constance?" *Journal of Musicology* 20 (2003): 45–72.

To be successful as a composer, it was necessary to maintain a reputation for delivering products in a timely fashion, to guarantee them to be of superior quality, and to adopt the lifestyle of a responsible citizen, not some bohemian artist. Who was going to risk an investment in a prima donna who composes only when he wants to? Actually, we know the answer only too well: it was the Duke of Ferrara, who ended up hiring Josquin and not Isaac, despite Artiganova's warm recommendation. Yet we also know the rest of the story. It took the duke less than a year to discover that his investment was not going to pay off in the long run: Josquin departed for Condé-sur-l'Escaut after exactly twelve months.[16] Everything we know about Isaac suggests, on the other hand, that he would have stayed as long as the duke would have liked him to.

The success story of Isaac has often been told, yet there is much more to it, and in what follows I would like to explore some of its implications a little further. The guiding image in all this, and the theme of this contribution, is that of the *signature*. As far as I know, Isaac left more documents signed in his own hand than any other composer of his generation. One example comes from the payment records of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence: in May 1491, Heinrich Isaac, singer, signed for the receipt of his salary for the preceding month.[17] In itself there is nothing particularly significant about the document, for his fellow singers at the Santissima Annunziata signed for their salaries on the very same page. In fact, one could not even call this a formal signature, for Isaac wrote his name as part of a longer sentence: "I, Heinrich Isaac, have received one ducat in salary for the month of May 1491."

On the other hand, one of the curious things about signatures is that it does not actually matter whether they look formal or not, or whether they spell out the person's proper name or simply form a graphic symbol like the letter X. The point about signatures is that they have to be written *in one's own hand*. If we can be absolutely certain that it was the composer himself who held the quill and wrote that sentence in the Santissima Annunziata records, it is because the penalties for forging a signature were so draconian as to make the idea of doing it as unthinkable as the act itself was deemed reprehensible. Forgers are very near the bottom of Dante's hell—only traitors were considered more evil.

The second example is the signature placed by Isaac under his vow of service to King Maximilian when he agreed, as mentioned above, to

[16] Fallows, *Josquin*, 273.

[17] "Ego Henricus Yzac, cantor, recepj ducatum unum pro salario mensis maj anno 1491." Autograph receipt signed by Heinrich Isaac at Florence in 1491. Reproduction in Bianca Becherini, "Antonio Squarcialupi e il Codice Mediceo Palatino 87," *L'Ars nova italiana del Trecento: Primo Convegno Internazionale 23–26 Luglio 1959* (Certaldo: Centro di studi sull'Ars nova italiana del Trecento, 1962), 141–96, plate facing p. 170.

become court composer in 1497.[18] This time the inscription looks a little more like a formal signature, although truly formal signatures in this period usually involved intricate geometric designs of some kind as well. Once again, however, the issue is not really what the signature looks like. What matters is what Isaac confirms in the letters behind his name: *m.p.*, or *manu propria*, "by his own hand." It was necessary for him to add these letters because the rest of the document, the pledge of service itself, was not in his hand but that of a court clerk. In the Santissima Annunziata register it was not necessary to add those letters, because the entire sentence was in the hand of the man who identified himself in it as "I, Heinrich Isaac." Anyone pretending to be Isaac and to be writing this sentence in the account book would have been made to pay dearly for the counterfeit signature were he to be found out.

All of this leaves us with a question. What, exactly, is so important about signing a document in one's own hand? Why is it that this is more important even than what the signature looks like? The issue, of course, is a legal one, and it has to do with *authentication*. By signing a document one authenticates it: the signatory gives it the same legal power in his absence as if he were physically present to swear to its truth.[19] The document, in other words, is made to stand for the person. And for it to have that power, it is just as essential for the signatory to sign it in his own hand as it would be for him to speak the truth under oath. But this only leaves us with another question. What kind of document requires such authentication that it may be expected to stand for the person? In the two cases before us the answer is clear: we are dealing with transactions, with exchanges, services rendered and rewarded. The particular services rendered by Isaac in these examples are singing and composing. And in that respect the documents are actually quite unusual for their time. Have we come across contracts and receipts like this before in the history of music? Not that I know. Let us take a few steps back and consider why that would be the case.

As noted, the two examples of Isaac's signature are exchanges, involving services rendered and rewarded. But strictly speaking, "service" is not the right word in this context. A contract may require a signature, but *service* is not the sort of thing for which you need a contract. Service is not a commodity, not something that is traded or sold. A servant is not a mercenary, a person who undertakes a job for no other reason than to earn money for it. The original feudal idea of service, rather, is that it involves a personal bond, an understanding based on good faith. A good servant

[18] "H. Yzaac manu propria." Reproduction in La Mara [Marie Lipsius], *Musikerbriefe aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1886), 1:5.

[19] See, for example, Heather MacNeil, *Trusting Records: Legal, Historical and Diplomatic Perspectives* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 4–17.

is trusted to be diligent, and a good master is trusted to be generous. It really is a gift exchange: as a servant you give something without the explicit expectation of something in return, just as a waiter gives you good service in a restaurant. There is nothing the waiter can do if you don't give him a tip except be justified in thinking you're a schmuck—and you'll have to live with that for the rest of your life. To make either party do voluntary things under contractual obligation—for example, when service is included in the bill and the patron has no option but to pay it—is the same as suggesting that there is no faith. In the case at hand, it is as if Isaac has to sign in order to make sure that that he won't go back on his word. For a medieval musician such an implication would have been not merely demeaning but downright insulting. It is as if honor had nothing to do with what musicians spent their lives doing, that they were no better than a crew of cheap mercenaries. So it is probably not a coincidence that we find no composers' signatures in the financial administrations of fifteenth-century churches and courts. Even for men who misbehaved as badly as they sometimes did, signatures weren't needed.

But maybe, in the case of Isaac, this is precisely what tells us that we are moving toward a more modern idea of professional musicianship. The very fact that Isaac placed his signature confirms that we are not dealing with service in the original sense of the word. To place a signature is to act on one's own behalf, as an independent, legal person, to represent none other than oneself. A servant could never have done such a thing, at least not without the permission of his master. For a servant, legally speaking, was a dependent, like a child. Isaac was not. Herein I see the deeper significance of the idea of Isaac's signature. He was engaged in transactions involving, not services, but *work*—both in the sense of labor and that of the musical product. The very fact that he had the power to sign on his own behalf indicates that he was emancipated as a musician—indeed that he was a professional composer in the modern sense of the word.[20] Isn't it extraordinary that every time we have a significant piece of evidence about the changing status of composers and musical works, it should somehow involve Isaac?

And yet, considering all this, what are we to make of the next example: "Isaac de manu sua"? This inscription is found above three works by Heinrich Isaac in the manuscript Berlin 40021, written at the very top of the page—the place, in other words, where one would normally expect the attribution.[21] Instead of saying "this piece is by Heinrich

[20] For Isaac's relatively autonomous, free-lance activities in Florence as a composer, see also the new documents recently published in Wilson, "Heinrich Isaac among the Florentines."

[21] "H. Isaac de manu sua," "Ysacc de manu sua," "Ysaac de manu sua." These inscriptions are found above the compositions *In Gottes namen faren wyr*, the Kyrie of *Missa Une mousse de Biscaye*, and *Sanctissime virginis votiva festa*, in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer

Isaac," the inscriptions actually tell us that this piece is by Isaac *in his own hand.* What are we to make of this? Why would any user of the manuscript want to know, or even care?

At first blush it might be tempting to see such an inscription as yet another sign of the emancipation of the composer. A self-attribution of this kind, after all, seems to reflect an element of professional pride. Look at me. It was I who made this. And in truth there is some support for that possibility coming from the realm of art history. There is the famous case of Michelangelo's *Pietà* and the signature that was so prominently carved on it by the artist himself.[22] That signature represented a gesture so unusual for a piece of religious sculpture that contemporaries were left to wonder what had compelled the artist to do something like that. In Giorgio Vasari's famous *Lives of the Artists* we find two different explanations, in two successive editions. In the first edition, of 1550, Vasari wrote the following:[23]

Poté l'amor di Michelagnolo e la fatica insieme in questa opera tanto, che quivi (quello che in altra opera più non fece) lasciò il suo nome scritto attraverso in una cintola che il petto della Nostra Donna soccigne, *come di cosa nella quale e sodisfatto e compiaciuto s'era per se medesimo.*	Michelangelo placed so much love and labor in this work that on it (something he did in no other work) he left his name written across a sash which girds Our Lady's breast, *as something with which he himself was satisfied and pleased.*

"As something with which he himself was satisfied and pleased." It is tempting to read a similar implication in the proud announcement: "Isaac in his own hand." And yet Vasari's explanation fails to persuade. It may well be true that Michelangelo placed much love and labor in his work, as he wrote. But then so did all artists in his time, and they did not carve their names in their sculptures. Why did Michelangelo think he was so special? To cite a parallel example, it's a bit like the team

Kulturbesitz, MS. Mus. 40021, fols. 8r, 255v, and the pastedown to back cover. See Martin Just, "Isaac de manu sua," *Bericht über den internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Kassel 1962* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963), 112–14; Jessie Ann Owens, "An Isaac Autograph," in *Music in the German Renaissance: Sources, Styles, and Contexts,* ed. John Kmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 27–53.

[22] For this and what follows, see Aileen June Wang, "Michelangelo's Signature," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35 (2004): 447–73. See also Patricia Rubin, "Signposts of Invention: Artists' Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art," *Art History* 29 (2006): 563–99.

[23] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri* (Florence: Torrentino, 1550), ed. Luciano Bellosi and Aldo Rossi, 2 vols. (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1991), 2:886; trans. after Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists,* trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 425.

effort of organizing a conference. Everybody works hard to make the conference run smoothly, and in fact there is one team member who is doing a particularly excellent job, except that he somehow insists on writing his name on everything he has done. How would the rest of the team feel about this? What would it say about how he feels about them? Is he concerned about the collective goal, or rather about the credit that is his personal due? That, I assume, is precisely how most readers would have felt about Vasari's explanation: that Michelangelo, in placing his signature to express his satisfaction with his effort, would have been guilty of the cardinal sin of pride—as if he believed himself to be a better Christian than other artists who likewise did the best they could for the glory of God.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the second edition of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* replaced this interpretation by a completely different one. This time, in 1568, Vasari wrote:[24]

> nascendo che un giorno Michelagnolo entrando drento dove l'è posta vi trovò gran numero di forestieri lombardi che la lodavano molto, un de' quali domandò a un di quegli chi l'aveva fatta, rispose: "Il Gobbo nostro da Milano." Michelagnolo stette cheto e quasi gli parve strano che le sue fatiche fussino attribuite a un altro; una notte vi si serrò drento e con un lumicino, avendo portato gli scarpegli, vi intagliò il suo nome.

> which came about because one day when Michelangelo was entering the church where the statue was placed, he found a large number of foreigners from Lombardy who praised the statue very highly; one of them asked another who had sculpted it, and he replied: "Our Gobbo from Milan." Michelangelo stood there silently, and it seemed somewhat strange to him that his labors were being attributed to someone else; one night he locked himself inside the church with a little light, and, having brought his chisels, he carved his name upon the statue.

This story certainly has a more plausible ring to it. Surely one cannot deny the artist the right to protect his work from false attributions. It is not necessarily prideful to do that. In fact, it would be in line with what we already know about musical culture in this period—that misattributions were becoming a very sensitive issue for composers whose works were greatly valued. There is an intriguing parallel, for example, in the well-known story about Adrian Willaert, related by Gioseffo Zarlino. Sometime in the late 1510s, young Willaert arrived in Rome only to

[24] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (Florence: Giunti, 1568), ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), 7:152.

hear his own six-part motet *Verbum bonum et suave* being performed in the Papal chapel as a work misattributed to Josquin.[25]

mi souiene hora alla memoria quello, che molte fiate hò vdito dire dall' Eccellentissimo Adriano Vuillaerte, che cantandosi in Roma nella capella del Pontefice quasi ogni festa di nostra Donna quel motetto a sei voci, Verbum bonum, et suaue, sott' il nome di Iosquino; era tenuto per vna delle belle compositioni, che a quei tempi si cantasse: essendo lui venuto di Fiandra in Italia al tempo di Leone Decimo, et ritrouandosi in luogo, oue si cantaua cotal motetto, vidde che era intitolato a Iosquino; et dicendo lui, che era il suo, come era veramente; tanto valse la malignità, ouero (dirò più modestamente) la ignoranza di coloro, che mai più lo volsero cantare.	I remember what I have heard the most excellent Adrian Willaert tell many times, namely, that they used to sing that six-part motet *Verbum bonum et suave* under the name of Josquin at the Papal chapel in Rome on nearly every feastday of Our Lady. It was ranked among the most excellent compositions that were sung in those days. Now Willaert had moved to Italy from Flanders during the pontificate of Leo X [1513–21], and, finding himself in the place where they sang that motet, he noticed that it was ascribed to Josquin. When he pointed out that it was in fact his own, as it indeed was, such was their malice, or rather (to put it more generously) their ignorance, that they never wanted to sing it again.

If the risk of such misattributions was so real, one cannot really blame any composer for adding "in his own hand" to the mark of authorship. After all, if two people are going to disagree over the authorship of this or that piece, what would be the more authoritative document to settle the matter: one signed simply "Josquin," or one signed "Willaert in his own hand"?

What is attractive about this explanation is that it sticks closer to the idea of the signature as a form of authentication. "Isaac in his own hand" is a different way of saying "this is a genuine Isaac." Yet there is still a problem about the explanation. In the context of a musical manuscript, the expression "in his own hand" does not actually have any legal significance. It does not make any difference to the attribution, for one simple reason: it was not a punishable offence to misattribute a musical work. For somebody who was not Isaac, it would not necessarily be a crime to write "Isaac in his own hand" above a piece—anyone could do that just as a joke. To cite a parallel, if I own a copy of Lewis Lockwood's *Music in Renaissance Ferrara* but erase his name on the title

[25] Gioseffo Zarlino, *Istitutioni harmoniche* (Venice: Gardano, 1558), part 4, chap. 36, p. 346.

page and write in its place "Rob C. Wegman," I may be a fool but I am not a criminal. An ascription is simply that. It is not a signature.

This leaves us with an obvious question: why does it say "in his own hand" in the manuscript Berlin 40021, as though these inscriptions really were signatures? The answer to that question was discovered long ago by Martin Just.[26] He found that all three compositions with the inscription "Isaac in his own hand" are written on sheets of paper that were once folded several times over. And that, in turn, can mean only one thing: although the sheets are now part of a choirbook, they must originally have been sent as letters. Strictly speaking the sending of a letter is another transaction: there is something that changes hands, in this case a musical work. Now it is easier to see why this might require a signature. A signature, as I have said, is a form of authentication. To place a signature is to give a document the same power as if one were present in person. In the case at hand it means that these three pieces were guaranteed to be authentic Isaac compositions as surely as if they had been hand-delivered by the composer. That, in its turn, can mean only one thing: these compositions had been commissioned and sold, just as the *Choralis Constantinus* was sold by Isaac and bought by the cathedral authorities of Constance.[27] No proof of authenticity is needed when you receive something as a gift, for the value of the gift lies in the gesture of giving, not in the object itself.[28] But when you receive something in exchange for money you are entitled to proof of its authenticity. Then the object has become a commodity, and that is precisely what we find in these three cases. Once again, Isaac's signature marks a critical step in the commodification of the musical work and the professionalization of the composer.

If there is one thing we know about the period known as the Josquin generation, it is its uncommon and unprecedented concern with the truth of attributions, indeed with musical authentication in general.[29] This concern may have found expression in Isaac's signatures, but

[26] Just, "Isaac de manu sua."

[27] The question arises whether it would have been essential, for this guarantee, that Isaac himself physically copied out the music in each letter—in which case one would expect the handwriting to be very similar or identical. Throughout the fifteenth century, formal letters were normally dictated to scribes, with only the signature or the seal to attest to their authenticity. If we allow that possibility here, however, then *de manu sua* must have been understood in a metaphorical sense, meaning "of his own invention." This meaning need not necessarily contradict Jessie Ann Owens's discovery that in at least one case, Isaac's composition appears to have been conceived in the process of being written down, that is, it originated as a sketch. This, after all, is true of letters generally in this period.

[28] An excellent treatment of this topic is Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1983).

[29] Wegman, "From Maker to Composer"; idem, "Who Was Josquin?" in *The Josquin Companion,* ed. Richard Sherr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–50.

it was bound to find expression in other aspects of the musical work—aspects that might well become signatures by metaphorical extension. There is an example of this, I think, in a true story related by Glarean in his treatise *Dodecachordon* published in 1547. Decades before the publication of this book, Glarean had visited Paris and had met there with the aging composer Jean Mouton. Unfortunately we know very little about the conversation that took place, but Glarean does offer one extremely interesting tidbit. Here is what he writes:[30]

> Ioannes Mouton Gallus, quem nos uidimus, quemadmodum antea in hoc adeo libro testati sumus, raritatem quandam habuit studio ac industria quaesitam, ut ab alijs, quos hactenus commemorauimus differret, alioqui facili fluentem filo cantum edebat. Maxime autem in Principis Francisci gratiam, a quo honeste decoratus erat, respiciens, Psalmos ac uulgata quaedam proferebat, quod testatur cantio, Domine saluum fac Regem . . .

> The Frenchman Ioannes Mouton, whom we have seen [in person], as we reported earlier in this very book, had a certain rare quality [or: fine weave] searched out through application and industry, in order that he would be different from the others whom we have mentioned until now, and in some respects he produced music flowing with an easy thread. Being mindful especially of the favor of King François, by whom he had been properly honored, he composed psalms and some secular songs; this regard is shown in the song *Domine salvum fac regem* . . .

What a priceless document: it is one of the earliest texts to testify to an emerging conception of personal style. Individual style is indeed a notion that we see entering public consciousness in the early sixteenth century. There are numerous indications that musicians and listeners became preoccupied with the individual style of composers, if only because in many cases this might be the only criterion by which to tell a true Josquin motet from a misattribution. But personal style as an idea can be conceptualized in different ways. One model, still influential today, is that of expression. It holds that an artist cannot help but express his personality in his work, to make everything he creates somehow a reflection, a mirror image, of his character. This is the Platonic idea that Leonardo captured in the famous *bon mot*: "Every painter paints himself."[31] But actually this is not what Glarean implies about

[30] Heinrich Glarean, *Dodecachordon* (Basel, 1547; repr. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1967), 460; trans. Clement A. Miller, Musicological Studies and Documents 6 ([n.p.]: American Institute of Musicology, 1965).

[31] Martin Kemp, "Ogni dipintore dipinge se: A Neoplatonic Echo in Leonardo's Art Theory?" *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 311–23.

Mouton. He reports that Mouton consciously manufactured his personal style, through application and industry, with the specific aim of making his music sound differently from that of others. So the style did not evolve as the unconscious expression of his personality, but rather was consciously manufactured in order to authenticate his work, to make it recognizably different from the work of other composers. It served, in other words, as a kind of signature. As far as I am aware, all attempts in the sixteenth century to capture the personal styles of composers—including the one discussed by James Haar—have this element of deliberation in common.[32] Personal style in music was taken to be a conscious creation, not an involuntary expression of personal character.

With this metaphorical extension, the theme of Isaac's signature takes on a new dimension. Is there, in fact, such a thing as a signature *in Isaac's music*, something by which we can recognize his works as authentically his? Did the world in which he lived have some conception of Isaac's musical signature? If so, what was it? There is one text from within Isaac's lifetime that answers at least the first part of this question with a resounding yes. It is a well-known passage from Paolo Cortesi's *De cardinalatu libri tres*, printed in 1510.[33] Cortesi's book is of considerable importance to the history of musical mentalities: it may well represent the earliest known text to testify to contemporary conceptions of personal style. The author, who was not a professional musician but rather a card-carrying Ciceronian humanist, discussed several contemporary composers in succession—Josquin, Obrecht, Isaac, and others—and the point of his discussion seems to have been that each composer should be somehow typified in a distinctive way. Unfortunately, that is about as useful as his text will be for us, for when it comes to the second part of our question, Isaac's musical signature, Cortesi's comments are virtually meaningless. As far as he was concerned, discerning musical judgment was all about what he, as a Ciceronian, took to be the natural capacity of the human ear.[34] His chief concern is that the ear not be brought to satiety, not to mention disgust, by the overuse of one particular musical ingredient. And for each composer he singled out a different musical

[32] James Haar, "A Sixteenth-Century Attempt at Music Criticism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36 (1983): 191–209.

[33] Nino Pirrotta, "Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15th-Century Italy," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19 (1966): 127–61.

[34] I analyze this Ciceronian element more deeply in my forthcoming essay "'Tis not so sweet now, as it was before': Origins and Significance of a Musical Topos," *Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance: Festschrift Klaus-Jürgen Sachs zum 80. Geburtstag*, Veröffentlichungen des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Berlin (Hildesheim: Olms, in press).

ingredient that was allegedly overused in his works. About Isaac, for example, he writes:[35]

ex eodemque studio Herricus Isachius Gallus, maxime est appositus ad eiusmodi praecentoria construenda iudicatus: nam preterquam quod multo est caeteris in hoc genere fundendo celerior, tum ualde eius illuminat cantum florentior in struendo modus, qui maxime satus communi aurium naturae sit: sed quamquam hic unus excellet, e multis uitio tamen ei solere scimus, quod in hoc genere licentius catachresi, modorumque iteratione utatur, quam maxime aures fastidii similitudine in audiendo notent.	For a similar inclination Herricus Isachius Gallus is judged to be most apt to compose such precentorial songs; for, in addition to being much quicker than all the others in pouring forth this genre, then also his style of composition brightens the singing so floridly that it more than satiates the ordinary capacity of the ear. But, although he is the one who excels among many, nevertheless we know that it happens to be blamed on him that he uses in this genre catachresis [literally, improper use of words] and repetition of modes more liberally than the most the ear can take without sensing annoyance because of uniformity in what it listens.

Illuminat cantum florentior—literally, casts light upon the song in a more flowery fashion. What can it mean? I doubt that there is much to be gained from pondering that question too long. For our purposes it is enough to observe that at least the intention is there—the intention to hear something in the music that is distinctive about Isaac. Surely there will be other writers who will develop the notion of that intention in more concrete and useful terms.

And indeed there is another, who turns out to be none other than Heinrich Glarean, in another passage from his *Dodecachordon.* This passage is arguably one of the most significant texts in the history of Renaissance musical aesthetics. It would require a separate article to analyze in detail the major breakthrough it marks. Glarean articulates an entirely new way of conceptualizing what one hears when listening to polyphony. Interestingly, he does it specifically to describe what he considers peculiar about the music of Isaac. Here is what he writes:[36]

Sequitur haud imerito Symphonetas iam dictos et arte et ingenio Henrichus Isaac Germanus. Qui et erudite et copiose innumera composuisse dicitur. Hic maxime Ecclesiasticum	The German Henrichus Isaac follows very justly the aforementioned composers in both art and talent. He also is said to have composed innumerable compositions, learnedly and prolifically. He embellished

[35] Paolo Cortesi, *De cardinalatu libri tres* (Castro Cortesio: Symeon Nicolai Nardi alias Rufus Calchographus, 1510), fols. 72r–74v, after Pirrotta, "Music and Cultural Tendencies," 147–55.

[36] Glarean, *Dodecachordon,* 460.

ornauit cantum uidelicet in quo uiderat maiestatem ac naturalem uim, non paulo superantem nostrae aetatis inuenta fšmata, Phrasi aliquanto durior nec tam sollicitus, ut consuetudini quid daret, quam ut elimata essent, quae ederet. Id etiam uoluptati duxit copiam ostendere maxime **Phthongis in una quapiam uoce immobilibus, caeteris autem uocibus cursitantibus ac undique circumstrepentibus, uelut undae uento agitatae in mari circa scopulum ludere solent**, Quod et Hobrechthum fecisse constat, quanquam alio quodam modo.

church song especially; namely, he had seen a majesty and natural strength in it which surpassed by far the themes invented in our time. Somewhat rough in *phrasis*, he was not so anxious to do something in the customary way as to bring forth the compositions which had been elaborated. It also gave him pleasure to show his versatility especially in **tones remaining unchanged in any one voice, but with the other voices running about and clamoring around everywhere, just as waves moved by the wind are accustomed to play about a rock in the sea**; it is well known that Obrecht also did this, although in a certain other way.

This passage has of course long been famous. It offers an attractive and compelling visual image, and one that somehow feels instantly familiar. Glarean describes the kind of counterpoint in which one voice sustains a single note while the others swirl around it in contrapuntal busywork. He says that it gave Isaac "pleasure" to write such counterpoint. That is not quite what one would call a personal style, but then again a musical signature does not have to be something as global as a style. It can also be a distinctive trait, a fingerprint. And in this case the particular musical device is distinctive enough for Glarean to note that although Obrecht employed this device as well, he did so "in a certain other way."

At the same time, the passage begs so many questions that it is hard to know where to start. Let us begin by noting how archaic is the practice that Glarean describes. Essentially, the discussion is about old-style cantus-firmus treatment, of the kind that few of his readers were likely to appreciate in composed music in the late 1540s. Was Isaac that much of a conservative? That is a good question, for there is another obvious problem about Glarean's comment. What particular passages in the work of Isaac did he have in mind? Where do we find the stretch of counterpoint that can be aptly described as wind-swept waves playing about a rock in the sea? Richard Taruskin once suggested that a good example might be the final chord of Isaac's motet *Virgo prudentissima*.[37] Here the tenor and top voice hold a single note while the other voices move within the sonorities allowed by that note. Still, I am not persuaded that Glarean would have had this particular ending in mind. One aspect he emphasizes in his description is the extreme contrast in motion between the tenor and the other voices. The tenor stays put, but

[37] Richard Taruskin, Communication, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42 (1989): 445.

EXAMPLE 1. Anonymous, *Missa Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, opening of the Gloria

the other voices, he says, are "running about and clamoring around everywhere." He also implies that the motion of the other voices is erratic and uncoordinated, as if the tenor were the only voice that remained steady and composed in what was otherwise a madhouse of polyphony. Yet the final chord of *Virgo prudentissima* is hardly a madhouse: it is actually a tightly organized passage. It is true that the tenor and top voice stay put on a single note, but the other voices move in a well controlled and coordinated fashion, and ultimately the impression is not one of energetic motion but at best of a stately procession.

If the truth be told, I have found it very hard to find any passage that meets Glarean's precise description, not only in Isaac but also in the works of other composers. Within the realm of sacred music I can think of only one example that comes close: the anonymous *Missa Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, probably from the early years of the sixteenth century.[38] The Gloria of this Mass cycle has extremely long-held notes in the tenor, with the other voices exchanging motives and figurations around it (ex. 1). Still, I

[38] *Missa Anonyma II aus dem Codex Breslau Mf. 2016*, ed. Fritz Feldmann, Das Chorwerk, 56 (Wolfenbüttel: Möseler Verlag, 1956).

EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)

8

pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne

pax ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne vo - lun - ta -

ho - mi - ni - bus bo - ne

12

vo - lun - ta - tis. Lau - da - mus te. Be - ne - di - ci - mus

tis. Lau - da - mus te. Be - ne - di - ci - mus te.

vo - lun - ta - tis. Lau - da - mus te. Be - ne - di-

16

te. Ad - o - ra - mus te. Glo -

Ad - o - ra - mus te. Glo-

- ci - mus te. Ad - o - ra - mus te. Glo-

am not convinced even in this case that Glarean would have had a piece like this in mind. For the question remains. Are we hearing voices running about and clamoring everywhere, as he says about Isaac, or are we hearing a single chord that, although broken into triadic motives and figurations, is otherwise a single unchanging sonority?

EXAMPLE 2. Roelkin, *De tous biens plaine*

De tous biens playne

De tous biens playne

To hear something close to Glarean's description, I suspect, one would have to go into the realm of instrumental music. Perhaps it is not without significance that Glarean describes the musical effect as one of waves "playing" about a rock—*ludere*, a word that also meant playing on a musical instrument. Example 2 shows a composition that really does seem to exhibit the peculiar quality Glarean described. It is a setting of

EXAMPLE 2. (*continued*)

De tous biens plaine by a composer known only by his first name, Roelkin, or little Roland, possibly the Bruges organist Roeland Wreede.[39] One voice moves slowly through the notes of the cantus firmus, like someone who is taking a leisurely stroll in the park, but the other voice runs all over the place, like a young puppy that has just been let off the leash. With this example in mind, all we need to do now is imagine three or four puppies running around to and fro, and perhaps we have what Glarean meant to capture in his description.

Then again, something is not adding up here. How is it that Glarean's image is so seductively compelling and yet so hard to hear clearly in any music? Part of the reason, surely, is that the image is really a visual one. We may not think in terms of waves playing about a rock, but for us it's not hard to picture the same process in terms of a musical score—essentially a straight line encircled by several wavy ones. For Glarean, I suspect, the origin of the image may well lie in the experience of singing from partbooks. Yet however that may be, it is the visual element that is really so novel about his description. Glarean talks about music as something moving through three-dimensional space. The voices run *around* the tenor—the word is *circumstrepere*, "making a noise around" the tenor. They do not so much move up and down vertically, but toward or away from the tenor horizontally, with the tenor itself staying motionless.

That image is easier to grasp in visual terms than it might be to hear musically, but that does not necessarily make it less compelling. To this day there are many things we assume we are supposed to hear in music, even though it requires considerable mental effort to persuade ourselves that we are actually hearing them. Think only of the paradox of ascribing structure—an architectural metaphor—to the variations in air pressure that our ears register as musical sound. And yet how compelling has the metaphor of structure not been in the last two centuries, how endlessly useful as an analytic tool? Structure may not be real in any tangible sense, but then what metaphor would be?

Still, it is worth emphasizing how odd and paradoxical Glarean's description would have sounded to anyone living at the time of Isaac's youth. Apart from anything else, Glarean uses the word "voice" in a way that nobody would have recognized fifty years before. *Vox*, throughout the Middle Ages and still in the fifteenth century, was not a thing that could run about or move from one place to another, not even metaphorically. It was the word for one pitch, or one solmization syllable,

[39] As suggested in my forthcoming essay "Obrecht and Erasmus," *Jacob Obrecht (1457/8): The Quincentenary Conference*, special issue of *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*, in press.

or, more generally, any sound produced by a being with a soul—as opposed to a dead musical instrument that could produce only a *sonus*. For example, if I were to sing the first phrase of the *L'homme armé* tune, somebody like Tinctoris would hear seven *voces* uttered successively. But Glarean, to judge from his description, would have heard one voice moving up and down while proceeding forward. At least in his description of Isaac's device, he heard counterpoint as the interplay of anthropomorphic voices running around a tenor. Accordingly, he needed to emphasize what kept the voices separate: it was the distance between them, conceived in spatial terms, as well as the difference in their rates of motion—once again, in the metaphorical dimension of space. As far as I am aware, writers in the fifteenth century did not typically speak about music in that way. In the Gloria of the anonymous *Missa Spiritus ubi vult spirat*, do we hear voices playing around a motionless tenor, or do we hear a single chord broken into smaller notes? If the latter, there is no need for us to disentangle the voices conceptually, to hear them as though they were operating independently: it would be enough to appreciate the wash of sound for what it is—a single sonority. No need to register the distance between voices or the different rates of motion. For there is nothing that moves as if it had been at point A and were now traveling toward point B. What we actually hear, at least according to mid-fifteenth-century ways of thinking, is a sound at this very second, which doesn't need to go anywhere because it is already where it should be: here and now.

Among the manifold implications of Glarean's metaphor is one that comes into focus in a text closely contemporary with the *Dodecachordon*. It is not a text about Isaac; nor is it a text that Glarean is likely to have known about, because it was written by Martin Luther, whose writings Glarean, as a Catholic, was not permitted to read. Yet Luther's text does articulate a way of hearing music that shares all the characteristics Glarean heard in the music of Isaac. Here is the passage, from the prologue to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae*, printed in 1538:[40]

Vbi autem tandem accesserit studium et Musica artificialis, quae naturalem corrigat, excolat et explicet, Hic tandem gustare cum stupore licet (sed non comprehendere)	But when, finally, human effort is joined with all of this, and man-made music, which improves on the natural kind, develops and unfolds, we can sense (but not comprehend)

[40] Martin Luther, foreword to *Symphoniae iucundae* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1538). After Luther, *Werke*: *Schriften* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 2003–7), 50: 372–73; see also Walter E. Buszin, "Luther on Music," *Musical Quarterly* 32 (1946): 81–82.

absolutam et perfectam sapientiam Dei in opere suo mirabili Musicae, in quo genere hoc excellit, **quod vna et eadem voce canitur suo tenore pergente, pluribus interim vocibus circum circa mirabiliter ludentibus, exultantibus et iucundissimis gestibus eandem ornantibus, et velut iuxta eam diuinam quandam choream ducentibus**, vt iis, qui saltem modice afficiuntur, nihil mirabilius hoc seculo extare videatur. Qui vero non afficiuntur, nae illi vere amusi et digni sunt, qui aliquem Merdipoetam interim audiant vel porcorum Musicam.

with astonishment the absolute and perfect Wisdom of God in His wondrous work of Music, in which nothing is more excellent than this, **that when one sings with one and the same voice pursuing its own course, several other voices play around it in the most marvelous manner, exulting and adorning it with the most pleasing gestures, and seeming almost to present some kind of divine dance,** so that it will seem to those with even the least bit of feeling that there exists nothing more marvelous in our time. Those who are not moved by this are indeed unmusical, and deserve rather to listen to some shit-poet or to the music of swine.

The parallels with Glarean are numerous: once again there is the verb *ludere*, to play, as if voices were behaving like instruments. Once again the word *vox* is metaphorically extended from its original meaning, a single pitch, to an entity somehow perceived to be able to play around, make gestures, and engage in a dance, as though it were a human agent. But above all, there is the need to capture the entire experience in a single visual image, this time an image not of waves washing up on a rock but of a divine dance. Undoubtedly this is a reference to the cosmic dance that Luther and his contemporaries still knew as the motion of the planets around the earth—an image that ultimately goes back to Plato's *Timaeus*.[41] With this image in mind, we could visualize the tenor as the motionless earth in the center. The various contrapuntal voices are like planets orbiting the earth. Isaac, one imagines, is the angel turning the wheel. The image of the wheel of the planets is compelling, but not accurate in every respect. It suggests that the planets orbit around the earth in regular and steady fashion. Yet from the viewpoint of Luther's time—the geocentric viewpoint before Galileo—few things were more erratic than the motions of the planets: they went forward at one moment, in retrograde the next, then forward again, without apparent rhyme or reason. So it is even the element of erratic motion—different rates of speed, different directions—that Luther captured in

[41] James L. Miller, *Measures of Wisdom: The Cosmic Dance in Classical and Christian Antiquity*, Visio: Studies in the Relations of Art and Literature, 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

his image, just as pointedly as did Glarean in his image of the waves playing around the rock.

All this is unlikely to be coincidence: here are two intellectuals and musicians struggling to find new words and images for an as yet unarticulated way of listening to music. If we think through the conceptual implications of what they say, many elements of early-sixteenth-century musical culture begin to make sense in a different way—pervading imitation, dissonance treatment, even scoring.[42] But for now, the point to be emphasized is that it is Isaac whose music prompts the effort in Glarean, indeed whose music is seen to feature this very device as a kind of personal signature. So what seemed arch-conservative cantus-firmus treatment a moment ago is now something avant-garde: music whose special quality is that it seems to invite—or at least to respond especially well to—a new way of hearing and conceptualizing counterpoint.

By now we have seen Isaac's name associated so often with major shifts and transformations in musical culture that it is worth wondering if this, perhaps, is yet another sign of his success as a composer. It would go too far to dwell on that question here, but it is an exciting possibility. It means that the expression "Isaac's signature" stands for is more than a mark of authentication even in its broadest metaphorical sense. It would also, to some degree, stand for the signature he was seen to have placed on the musical world of his time.

Indeed, Isaac did place his signature on his world, very clearly. Without his example, it would have been much harder to tell the story of the birth of the composer, or of the commodification of the musical work. There was no one who ran the business of being a composer as professionally and successfully as he did. Josquin may have been more successful in that he won the Ferrara job over Isaac. But given that Josquin left Ferrara within a year, it is worth asking how successful he really was. Perhaps he left Ferrara because of the plague, as Lewis Lockwood once suggested; or perhaps he was so difficult to get along with,

[42] It is worth emphasizing that this is a historicist interpretation based on the premise that the "truth" of a composition is never wholly and exclusively contained in its objective notational trace, but is mediated through discursive practices that are of necessity historically contingent—for which reason, changes in discourse, like the one signaled in Glarean's *Dodecachordon*, can be of critical importance to our understanding of music history, even if compositions as such do not seem to have changed in any objective sense, at least not immediately. (To cite an analogy, the so-called Copernican revolution loses none of its historical significance because of the knowledge that there were no objective changes in the solar system that prompted it.) To the objection that we may not gain insights into Isaac's "actual music," the historicist can only respond by questioning the notion of "the actual music," as though such a thing existed and was open to our insights, outside of all historical contingency.

and so overpaid for the little he actually accomplished, that his fellow singers conspired to make life at the court intolerable for him. Beyond this one example, however, Josquin's success in life was really that of an ecclesiastic, not a professional composer—he ended up becoming the provost of the collegiate church at Condé. No matter how far back we stand from Renaissance music history, then, we will recognize Isaac's signature in the very different life he made for himself, that of a professional composer in a world that could often be surprisingly hostile to his trade. That signature may not be quite as entertaining as some of the stories we can tell about other composers. But it certainly is a much better reason to honor this perennially intriguing figure and his legacy.

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ABSTRACT

The notion of the signature could serve as an appropriate metaphor by which to explore Heinrich Isaac as a man of his time and world. It may be mere coincidence that he has left more documents signed in his own hand than contemporary composers, but some of the documents he authenticated in this way really do attest to a new idea of professional musicianship that Isaac was the earliest and most successful in implementing: that of the professional composer who undertakes to produce new works under contractual obligation. Isaac is the first-known musician who signed a document specifically in this capacity. Yet his signature, or at least the assurance that he personally composed and signed a musical work, is also found in the context of practical musical sources, where they would appear to have no legal significance. Martin Just has shown, however, that the particular folios containing these compositions, in the manuscript Berlin 40021, were originally sent as letters. The implication is that Isaac's signature, in this case, is not an attribution so much as a mark of authentication—something that would have been required only if the musical works in question were sent, and changed hands, as part of a commercial transaction.

Taking the metaphor of the signature in a broader figurative sense, one could suggest that Isaac's work also bears his musical signature—namely in the personal style that his contemporaries tried to recognize and in some cases to characterize in words. Two authors who tried to capture the peculiar quality of Isaac's music are Paolo Cortesi and Heinrich Glarean. The latter's attempt is especially significant, since Glarean seems to attest to a new way of hearing and conceptualizing

polyphony. Although it is hard to identify specifically which passages in Isaac's music he would have had in mind, the key to his appraisal seems to lie in a different way of conceptualizing the interplay of contrapuntal voices in contemporary music. To the extent that we can associate this with Isaac's musical signature, it would appear, once again, that this composer, more than any other, was at the forefront of some of the most significant developments in the music history of his time.

Keywords: authorship, birth of the composer, gift economy, musical work, signature