

From Canon to Feedback

1§. INTRODUCTION

This project aims to connect pieces of ancient and contemporary music based on the common formal principle of repetition.

It was initially driven by two works for solo trombone and electronics composed in the twentieth century, *Ricercare una Melodia* (1984) by Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012) and *Rondell* (1975) by Rolf Gehlhaar (1942–2019). Both works are rooted in ancient forms, but their production calls for modernity through real-time electronics, which in both pieces hold an important musical role.

The electronics used in these two pieces, initially designed for magnetic tapes, are very simple and rely solely on delays, feedbacks, variations in speed and spatialization. Their musical role, however, makes direct reference to medieval artistic forms, as the titles suggest: a rondel is a form of poem based on the repetition and reorganization of certain verses, while the *ricercare* is an ancient contrapuntal form located historically between the canon and the fugue. The principle of copying a melody to another voice, with or without transformation and shifted in time, is present from the birth of polyphony. It is also found in motets and fantasies. The technology used allows an almost perfect copy not only of a motif but of its sound production and pushes this principle to the extreme.

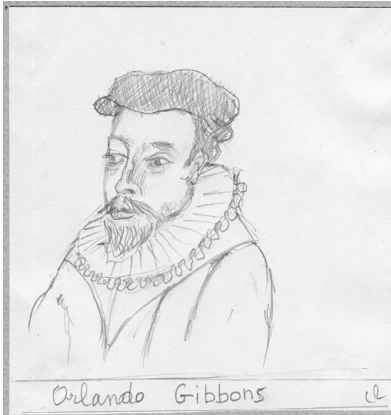
This project presents early music composers who lived between the second half of the fourteenth century and the seventeenth century. They were little known, but their exhibited works are emblematic of the aforementioned musical forms: Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), Domenico Gabrielli (1651–1690), and Georg-Phillip Telemann (1681–1767).

The following set of texts deals with notions of musical composition, evolving into the term “Feedback” which is a technical, musical and literary notion.

2§. THE COMPOSERS.

Five composers illustrate *From Canon to Feedback* and punctuate the time axis of musical creation. Our choice was influenced by the adaptability of the pieces for the trombone(s), but many “contestants” saw their participation declined due to lack of time and space.

Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625) was born and baptized on December 25, 1583 in Oxford, United Kingdom. He comes from a family of professional musicians and is one of the great composers of the English Golden Age. He was an organist of the Royal Chapel at the age of twenty-one, a position he retained throughout his life. He was also a late organist at Westminster Abbey. Gibbons is a composer of works for the Anglican Church and paraphrases from biblical texts. He wrote for organ, virginal (a keyboard instrument), harpsichord, viols and voice. Pianist Glen Gould describes this music as follows: “a heart-wrenching expressiveness, a meditative introspection,



a feeling of extremely beautiful music, astonishing intelligence of the tonal system.”¹ Orlando Gibbons left few works, but considered to be of high quality; he excelled in the art of counterpoint. He is buried in Canterbury Cathedral.

Domenico Gabrielli (1659–1690)

was born in Bologna, capital of Emilia Romagna in northern Italy. As a cellist, he

was part of the orchestra of San Petronio Cathedral. He was president of the Academia Philharmonica in Bologna and musician at the court of Duke Francesco d’Este of Modena. Gabrielli was highly regarded as a musician and a composer, nicknamed “Minghino dal viulunzeel” (Dominic of the cello). He wrote operas, oratorios, cantatas, sonatas; but above all he was one of the first to compose for solo cello, including seven Ricercari. Ricercari are instrumental pieces imitated from motets and written using imitation. With

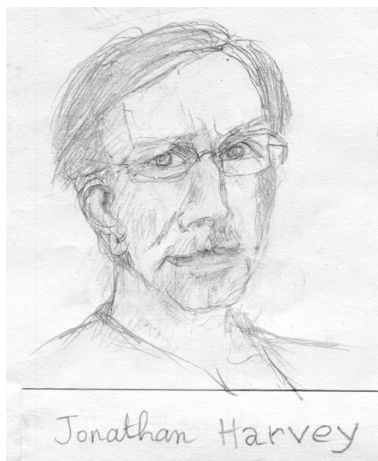


Gabrielli also appears a new style in the cantata, making use of a constant instrumental ritornello.

Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) is one of the important German musicians of an exceptionally fruitful period, the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Born in Magdeburg, a city in eastern Germany, a few years after the organist Heinrich Schütz, the same year as Georg Friedrich Handel, and four years before Johann Sebastian Bach, he will be a contemporary of Mozart and Haydn. Son of a Lutheran pastor, Telemann is a gifted young man and his passion for music manifested itself early on. He becomes a musician despite the disagreement of his mother and allegedly teaches himself to play the recorder, the violin, the viola da gamba, the organ, the flute, the oboe, the double bass and even the trombone. At the age of twelve, he writes an opera. He becomes the audience’s favorite German composer, ahead of Bach. Telemann also founded the “Collegium Musicum” (institution which will endure and later on be presided by Bach), organizing important concerts for profane audiences. He held prestigious musical positions, including that of Cantor Johannei and Directo Musices of Hamburg. He was a friend of Bach and godfather to his second son, Karl Emmanuel, himself a renowned composer and theorist. He was



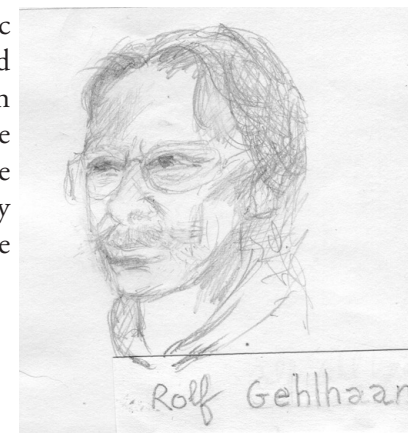
also Handel's great friend. Telemann would always find the time to take care of his garden for which his good friend gifted tulips, even alongside publishing over 6,000 works.



Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012) and Rolf Gehlhaar (1943–2019), the two composers who represent the modern period in our CD, have parallel paths. Harvey, British by origin, trained in England. He intended to teaching and perfected himself in art history. Following various encounters, he turned to Christian spirituality, the use of technology and a mystical vision. His time in the United States (Stanford) and in France (IRCAM) confirms him as a major composer of our time.

Rolf Gehlhaar is of Polish origin and has been living in the United States since he was ten years old. He followed an American apprenticeship (Yale and Berkeley) in philosophy, science and composition. From 1967 he lived in Cologne (FRG) and became assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen. He founded the *Feedback Studio*: a performance center and publishing house for avant-garde music. He became a teacher in England and jointly carried out an activity as a composer. The majority of his production is electroacoustic.

These two pioneers use electroacoustic techniques to create sound copies aligned with the time arrow. They accomplish what composers of other eras wrote for traditional instruments with the technologies of their time. We pay tribute to them. They are thus part of the evolution of music.



3§. THE WORKS AND THEIR NAME

This recording includes pieces of different origins depending on the country and the period. Their names deserve to arouse our interest: does a *Ricercare* have to have a particular shape? Is a *Fantasy* pure fantasy of the composer? Does the *Rondell* have an obscure relationship with the Rondeau form? Here are some questions that guided the choice of the contents of this disc.

At the start of this project I had recorded two contemporary works for trombone and tape delay². These two works were composed around the 1980s, a period of electronic music craze; both take their inspiration

from the composition techniques of the past. *Rondell* by Rolf Gehlhaar and *Ricercare una melodia* by Jonathan Harvey exploit this technical tape delay facility to musically create several voices with a single instrument.

Ancient forms

The *Ricercare* (ricercar: research) is an instrumental piece of fairly loose structure.³ This form [...] appears from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Italians give it the name of *ricercare*, *fantasia* or *capriccio*; the English call it *fancy*: but the form also exists in Spain, Germany, and France. In the 17th century, it evolves into the fugue, form to which it will give birth. *Ricercare* uses contrapuntal imitation writing. It usually consists of several episodes. Unity is ensured only by tempo and key.

There are many composers who wrote *ricercari*. It was in Bologna, in 1689, that the brilliant cellist of San Petronio Cathedral Orchestra, Domenico Gabrielli, wrote his seven *Ricercari* for cello without accompaniment. He was, at the time, one of the first to compose pieces for solo cello. In our recording we selected his 1st *Ricercare*, as well as a *Canon*.

The *Canon* is an imitation, continuous and close, in which the two terms (the antecedent and the consequent) are overlaid. This writing process, practiced by many composers, appeared towards the end of the thirteenth century in England. The genre developed in the fourteenth century and thus reached the peak of its complexity.

Orlando Gibbons

The image displays a musical score for the beginning of *Fantasia V a 2* by Orlando Gibbons, illustrating contrapuntal imitation. The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature (C). It is divided into four systems, each showing two staves. The first system (measures 1-6) features a single melodic line in the upper staff, with a label below: "à l'unisson, décalage = 4 mesures". The second system (measures 7-11) shows the first line imitating the second, with labels: "à l'unisson, décalage = 2 ♩". The third system (measures 12-16) shows the first line imitating the second at a fourth interval, and the second line imitating the first at a fifth interval, with labels: "à la quarte, décalage = 1 mesure" and "à la quinte, décalage = 1 ♩". The fourth system (measures 17-21) shows the first line imitating the second at a sixth interval, with a label: "à l'unisson, décalage = 6 ♩". Colored boxes highlight the imitative entries: pink for the first line, green for the second line, orange for the first line at a fourth, and blue for the second line at a fifth.

Figure 1 : Beginning of *Fantasia V a 2* by Orlando Gibbons.