



Tudor Royal Singers on the Road

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Abstract: The “Gentlemen Singers” of Henry VIII’s Privy Chamber were offered a new benefit in 1544: “att every removeing, allowance of a cart for the carriage of their stuff.” Many Tudor singers spent a significant amount of time on the road. This was true above all for the royal household musicians who followed kings and queens in their “removeings” and progresses. Itinerant music-making attracted its share of controversy, as we can see in a variety of contexts, from the court reforms of the Eltham Ordinances (which described touring with a large professional choir as a cause of “great annoyaunce ... labour, travail, charge and payne”) to the unscripted musical duel that took place when the peripatetic Chapel Royal singer Robert Philips made an appearance as guest soloist at St George’s, Windsor. This article explores the practicalities of life for Tudor royal singers on the road: the “stuff” they carried, the types of music they sang in various situations, and the ideological turmoil they often faced at close range.

Keywords: music; ritual; singers; progress; Henry VIII; Chapel Royal.



The young Henry VIII was, among many other things, an enthusiastic amateur composer. Thirty-five of his compositions have survived. It is a more extensive catalogue than we have from early-Tudor musical luminaries such as Fayrfax (30 pieces), Cornysh (24), Ludford (21), Browne (13), or Davy (13).¹ This sort of counting exercise is of course misleading because some (though by no means all) of the extant musical works by “The Kynge .H. viij” are ephemera and trifles of varying quality, items that might well have been discarded in the case of a non-royal composer; in fact, almost all of the king’s compositions are concentrated in a single manuscript source (British Library, MS Add. 31922) alongside other repertory associated with his court.² There are also two known musical works by him that are now lost. It is an unfortunate loss, because those two works were neither trivial nor ephemeral. The chronicler Edward Hall, looking back on the early years of Henry’s reign from the perspective of the 1540s, tells us that the king composed “.ii. goodly masses, euery of them fyue partes.”³ Hall also gives a surprising piece of information about these two masses: they were composed on the road, during the summer progress of 1510.

Hall’s chronicle records this feat of large-scale musical composition as only one of Henry’s many achievements as he travelled on his first royal progress. The “goodly masses” are mentioned just after various athletic exploits by the king—“daunsyng, wrastelyng, casting of the barre”—and just before two targeted acts of political violence, his beheadings of Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, who had been his father’s financial enforcers and whose services were no longer required under the new regime. Musical creativity is presented here as part of the whole testosterone-laden excess of the young king’s journey, and perhaps also as a hint of irrepressible fecundity. Hall reports that these two masses had a robust lifespan. They were not just occasional works for a single summer progress; they “were song oftentimes in hys chapel, and afterwarde in diverse other places.” It is unlikely that this was mere wishful thinking on Hall’s part. Some of his readers would have been in a position to verify his statement first-hand, and Hall himself had spent the years immediately following 1510 first at Eton College and then (from 1514 onward) at King’s

¹ Greer, “Henry VIII”; Sandon, “Fayrfax”; Greer and Kisby, “Cornysh”; Skinner, “Ludford”; Bowers, “Browne”; Skinner, “Davy.”

² Fallows, *Henry VIII Book*, 21–23.

³ Hall, *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies*, fol. Bbb.ij r.

College, Cambridge, two of the most significant "other places" where elite choral music was being sung in England.⁴

We learn from Hall that both of Henry's progress masses were in "fyue partes," the full five-voice formal texture of early-Tudor ecclesiastical polyphony. This full choral sound would attract some controversy at court. The Eltham ordinances promulgated in January 1526 were a plan for comprehensive court reform, including a new rule that, whenever the court was on progress, the Chapel Royal would be pared down to no more than six men and six children singing a highly abbreviated round of services, limited on most days to a Lady Mass in the morning and a single votive antiphon in the afternoon. The ordinances state that "it would not only be a great annoyaunce but also excessive labour, travail, charge and payne to have the King's hole chappell contynually attendaunt upon his persone, when his Grace kepith not his hall, and specially in rideing iourneys and progresses."⁵

Those are strong words to describe the experience of taking a large choir on tour all year round: labour, travail, charge, pain, and great annoyance. There are only five other things in the long and complex Eltham text that are described as "annoyances": the presence of hangers-on at court who are "rascals and vagabonds" (§31); excessive numbers of yeomen of the guard, taking up space and resources (§32); filthy and unhygienic kitchen staff (§37); rubbish accumulating outside the royal chambers (§51); and royal barbers "resorting to the company of vile persons, or of misguided women" (§69).⁶ The sixth and last "annoyance" is the presence of "the King's hole chappell"—more than twenty professional singers and a large, ever-renewing group of boys, along with a multitude of clergy—accompanying the court on "rideing iourneys and progresses" (§78). By the mid-1520s, progresses had clearly become locations of musical excess alongside other types of excess. The new legislation of 1526 was designed to put an end to this excess.

There is no information on how the reduced group of singing-men was selected, although we can catch a hint of the politics of the process later in the sixteenth century in the autobiographical notes of Edward Underhill, who served with the itinerant royal bodyguard. He recalled the events of July 1554 as Mary I prepared to travel to Winchester for her wedding: "all the bookes of the ordinarys weare parused ... to consyder off every

⁴ Herman, "Hall, Edward."

⁵ *Collection of Ordinances*, 160–161; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 597, fols. 32r–v; Kisby, *Early-Tudor Royal Household Chapel*, 313–314.

⁶ *Collection of Ordinances*, 146; 147; 148; 153; 158.

mane.”⁷ Underhill was very nearly rejected as ideologically unsuitable to join the company, but he was defended first by his lieutenant Humphrey Radcliffe and then by a colleague “who sarved att the jurney to Laundersaye in the same bande thatt I dyde,” and he was ultimately included in the queen’s marriage progress.⁸

The modest requirements of the six-man “riding chapel” can be seen and handled in concrete form in a musical artefact from this generation: the manuscript set of three-voice Lady Masses by the Westminster composer Nicholas Ludford, reflecting the shape that royal progress music seems to have taken as Henry’s reign continued.⁹ British Library, MSS Royal Appendix 45–48 is a clutch of modest-sized partbooks (three for the singers, one for the organist) with luxury bindings embossed with the arms of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.¹⁰ These may well have been the “Bookes of priksonge masses foure” inventoried in 1542 among the king’s possessions stored at his Westminster palace.¹¹ Simple three-part harmony (known among English singers as “faburden”) was central to the everyday sound-world of early Tudor churches, but complex sacred music for only three voices, as heard in Ludford’s Lady Masses, was not at all typical in this generation. The unusual combination of high ceremonial style and sparse musical texture was well-suited to the demands of royal progresses, where the choir was limited to a mere handful of singers.

A similar mindset can be detected in one of Henry’s own surviving compositions. The long motet *Quam pulcra es*, the king’s only extant sacred work (on a voluptuous text adapted from the seventh chapter of the Song of Songs), shows that he could indeed—as Edward Hall said—compose pleasant-sounding sacred music on a large scale.¹² This motet is in just three voice-parts, the same reduced and portable scheme used by Ludford in Royal Appendix 45–48. In fact, *Quam pulcra es* belongs to the other genre of church music that was officially prescribed to be sung on progress: the non-liturgical votive antiphon, suitable (like the Lady Mass) for daily use on the road in a wide variety of circumstances.

The ideal of progress music that developed during the reign of Henry VIII was one of portability and compactness. The Eltham ordinances mention this as another benefit of a simplified singing routine: “for which purpose no great carriage either of vestments or

⁷ Underhill, “Autobiographical Anecdotes,” 168.

⁸ Underhill, “Autobiographical Anecdotes,” 169.

⁹ Williamson, “English Organ Music, 1350–1550,” 97–99.

¹⁰ Milsom, “The Date of Ludford’s Lady Masses,” 367–368.

¹¹ Hayward, *Inventory of Whitehall*, vol. 2, 169.

¹² Fallows, “Henry VIII as a Composer,” 28; Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, 112; BL, MS Music 24.d.2, 166v–167r.

bookes shall be required.”¹³ The Ludford partbooks would have required “no great carriage.” An evocative image drawn by an English artist in the mid-1520s shows a similar set of three-part music being used by what appears to be a group of six travelling Henrician singers.¹⁴ This illustration (Figure 1) in London, College of Arms, MS Vincent 152, is part of a depiction of the conferral of the Order of the Garter on Ferdinand, archduke of Austria, in 1523. The ceremonies were carried out at Ferdinand’s court by a group of four ambassadors (Sir Thomas Wriothesley, Dr. Edward Lee, Sir William Hussey, and Henry Parker, Lord Morley) who made the journey to Nuremberg with a grand entourage. “This Embassy of the King to the Archduke,” as Strype recounted in his *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, “was very splendid, as he affected Pomp and Magnificence in all his Business and Transactions abroad, and with foreign Princes.”¹⁵



Figure 1. Attributed to Sir Thomas Wriothesley, Garter King of Arms, *Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, with English ambassadors and musicians at his reception in 1523 of the Order of the Garter*, c. 1525, drawing. London, College of Arms, MS Vincent 152, p. 178.

¹³ *Collection of Ordinances*, 161; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 597, fol. 32v; Kisby, *Early-Tudor Royal Household Chapel*, 314.

¹⁴ Bowers, “The ‘Votive Antiphon,’” 151–152.

¹⁵ Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, vol. 1, 42.

The image in Vincent 152 shows a group of singers at the post-investiture banquet, an event that was described by Elias Ashmole as one of the "most magnificent Feasts" celebrated at the appointment to the Garter of a foreign dignitary.¹⁶ The singers are discreetly separated by a screen from the four English ambassadors and the newly-made knight of the Garter. They sing from a set of three notated parts in portable oblong format, like the three vocal parts in Royal Appendix 45–48, although the music appears in this case to be written in scrolls rather than in bound partbooks. The group consists of four lay musicians and two tonsured clerics; the lay singers are in charge here, holding the music, while their clerical brethren stand behind them, straining to see over their shoulders. These musicians are equipped to travel as light infantry, so to speak, with music which is easy to transport and does not require the use of a lectern (unlike the large choirbooks used by more sedentary institutions.) The rituals of the Order of the Garter were not part of Tudor court ceremony in the strictest sense, and the group we see singing in Vincent 152 is *not* the royal riding chapel. This image is nevertheless useful because it is a depiction, in an English manuscript, of a group of singers on a mission from Henry VIII, at almost the exact time the Eltham ordinances came into force, performing on the same scale and with the same resources envisioned by the new rules.

We can see the physical footprint of the travelling chapel from a different perspective in another Henrician drawing (Figure 2). London, British Library, Cotton Roll XIII 41 is a monumental map, five feet in diameter and nearly as much in height, showing the king's encampment on what was almost certainly one of his two personal military expeditions to northern France, either in 1513 or in 1544. One of the large tents (Figure 3), not far from the "kinges lodging" at the centre of the camp, is allocated to the "Chapilains." The chapel staff are only one layer removed from the innermost ring of the encampment, which is mostly taken up by various departments of the below-stairs household, the *domus providencie*, concerned with the daily production of food: kitchen, bakehouse, saucery, pastry, buttery, cellar, pantry, scullery, and the administrative office of the Clerk of the Kitchen.¹⁷ The clergy and musicians of the chapel are just outside this inner circle, next to the tent "for straunge Ambassadors." The provision of chapel music and ceremony, at home or on tour, was something which—like meal service—had to happen twice every day, come what may. Proximity meant greater efficiency, and the "Chapilains" occupied a more central and exclusive space in Henry's camp than the military personnel, by far the most

¹⁶ Ashmole, *Institution, Laws & Ceremonies*, 404.

¹⁷ Kisby, "Officers and Office-Holding," 17–19; Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII*, 261–274.

numerous group on this campaign, who formed a series of defensive rings in the outer zones of the map.



Figure 2. Military encampment of Henry VIII on one of his campaigns in France, in 1513 or in 1544. London, British Library, Cotton Roll XIII 41.



Figure 3. Tent for “Chapilains” (lower right) not far from “The kinges lodging.”
London, British Library, Cotton Roll XIII 41, detail.

The role of the singers, like that of the pastry chefs and sauciers, was essentially inward-facing, directed toward the person of the king and the complex ceremonies (both culinary and liturgical) surrounding him. Hired professional singers in the first half of the sixteenth century, especially in and around London, were routinely given the title of "conduct." That term was commonly used among the practitioners of just one other trade, namely bakers, including the bakers attached to Henry's court.¹⁸ An amendment made to the Eltham ordinances in May 1543 declared "that there should be encreased one Conduite in the office of the bake-house."¹⁹ The term "conduite" was still being used more than sixty years later among the court bakers of King James I.²⁰ Like the chapel staff, these workers produced valuable but ephemeral goods that needed to be re-created newly every morning.

Even with a reduced collection of "vestments or bookes," the musicians of the Chapel Royal would still have faced some logistical difficulties in transporting and maintaining the materials they needed to work effectively on tour.²¹ There is no known detailed record of the expenses of a group of Tudor singers on progress, but we can form some idea of their everyday realities by following the travels of a different type of small group. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 106 includes a fine-grained account of the expenses incurred by two Cambridge men, Ralph Ainsworth (master of Peterhouse) and John Madew (Regius Professor of Divinity), who were sent on a long journey in 1547–1548, accompanied by three assistants, to "confirm" all the charters, grants, and other foundational documents of the university.²² This was highly specialised travel, with large amounts of manuscript material, in an atmosphere of political and religious pressure. The stress of the journey—and of the process of recovering expenses after it was done—is captured in the occasionally querulous tone of the document. Along with the usual costs of travel (including lodging, laundry, boat hire, and the maintenance of extra horses "the wiche we were compelled to kepe" in case the five men were urgently summoned to a new location), there is the constant task of manuscript production, delivery, preservation, and correction:

¹⁸ OED, "conduct, adj. and n. (2)."

¹⁹ *Collection of Ordinances*, 209.

²⁰ *Collection of Ordinances*, 330.

²¹ *Collection of Ordinances*, 161; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 597, fol. 32v.

²² Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 106, fols. 28r–30r; Lamb, *A Collection of Letters*, 97–100.

Item for drawyng our spiritual Jurisdiction in due forme and alteryng it many tymes both in paper and parchment

Item for ii canvas bagges and a pen knyffe

Item for bryngyng all our old charters sealed from the Lord chancellor his house to London

Item for a case and a lokke for the same

Item for writing of our old charters in vi velloms of a goodly chauncerye hande

Item for the fine vellom and other charges about it

Item for writing one of the velloms ageyne wherein that error was conteyned

Item for writing all our old and auncient charters in a great and long boke together in paper and alteryng of the same dyvers tymes by reason of negligent drawyng of the bokes drawyn in Doctor

Heynes tyme by reason whereof wee were muche disteyned and put to great busynes and charge

These are all issues that would have been familiar to itinerant English singers in the first half of the century, who worked largely from manuscript sources and who built, enriched, and amended their musical repertory as they travelled. Royal musicians on progress would also have sympathised with the Cambridge charter team and their expensively maintained fast horses, “beyng frome tyme to tyme earnestly borne in hande to be spedde”: the riding chapel had to follow the iron whim of the monarch in last-minute itinerary changes.²³

Singers also encountered more mundane logistical problems on the road. Prominent among these was the transport and maintenance of beds, which seems to have been something of a concern for itinerant choirs. The household chapel of Henry Percy, fifth earl of Northumberland (1477–1527), did not travel as extensively as the full Chapel Royal, much less the king’s summertime riding chapel, but they moved regularly between the earl’s two castles at Wressle and Leconfield, as well as other points further south. Two carriages were allotted to the chapel staff for “every Remevall” from one residence to another: one carriage for their beds and bedding, one carriage for “ther Aparells and all outhur ther Stuff.” This luggage limit appears to have been strictly enforced: “And to have no mo Cariage allowed them but onely the said ij Cariages allowid theime.”²⁴

On 28 April 1544, the provision of lodging for the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal was radically restructured by giving the singers a shilling each per diem in “boardwages” (which more than doubled their cash income) and sending them out to find rooms locally rather than attempting to accommodate them all in the royal residences.²⁵ This would

²³ Lamb, *A Collection of Letters*, 97.

²⁴ *Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy*, 389.

²⁵ Ashbee, *Records of English Court Music*, vol. 7, 417; *Collection of Ordinances*, 212.

ideally have solved the problem of providing beds for a travelling choir, but the issue seems to have continued into the later sixteenth century and even beyond. The sergeant of the Chapel Royal vestry and his officers insisted in 1608 that none of "the gentlemen should have eyther bed or trunck to stand in the vestery," and that the gentlemen should not take liberties there in "the matter of lodging."²⁶ The sergeant claimed that this unauthorised use of chapel vestries as left luggage rooms (or indeed as sleeping accommodations) had been going on during the tenure of "syxe Lord Chamberlaines." If the number "syxe" was not an exaggeration for dramatic effect, singers had been leaving their beds and other gear in the vestry since the early days of Elizabeth's reign, under her first Lord Chamberlain, William Howard, first baron Howard of Effingham, who served from 1558 to 1572.

Rules for court singers were often strict on paper, but they could be modified in practice to suit a range of situations. The Eltham ordinances were amended in various ways during the second half of Henry's reign, with such amendments becoming more and more frequent in the 1540s. One change was made on 14 June 1544, just before Henry embarked definitively on his second invasion of France, which may well have been the exact military campaign depicted in such detail in Cotton Roll XIII 41. An order was issued that "James Hills and his fellows, Gentlemen Singers, shall have... att every removeing, allowance of a cart for the carriage of their stuff."²⁷ James Hills was not a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. He was one of the secular singers at Henry's court; he belonged to the separate and highly select group called "syngers of the pr[i]vey chambre."²⁸ Unlike a traditionally equipped group of church musicians, the Privy Chamber singers would have required rather little "carriage either of vestments or bookes." In fact, they seem to have been given no personal allowance at all for luggage transport up to this point. The Gentlemen of the Chapel, as we have seen, were granted an entirely different benefit in spring 1544, in the form of a substantial per diem for private lodging. They already had the use of a "caryage," and the services of a groom who would "kersse sure and trusse the stuff" before loading it into the carriage for transport.²⁹

A document from the very end of Henry's reign may offer a hint of why this new concession was made to "James Hills and his fellows, Gentlemen Singers." "Mr Hylle the Synger" reappears in a set of itemised bills drawn up from August 1546 through February

²⁶ Ashbee and Harley, *Cheque Books of the Chapel Royal*, vol. 1, 100.

²⁷ *Collection of Ordinances*, 208; TNA, E 36/231, 130.

²⁸ Ashbee, "Groomed for Service," 194.

²⁹ Myers, *The Household of Edward IV*, 139.

1547 by the court apothecary, Thomas Alsop.³⁰ The bills record the medicines and remedies prescribed by Alsop to various people at court, including the king in his last decline. This document is, among other things, a pungent and evocative smellscape of the court: rosewater, turpentine, "perfumes for the chapel" while Henry's body was lying in state. An entire leaf is dedicated to prescriptions for "Mr Hylle the Synger." There was clearly something very serious and very painful going on with this singer's health. He was the only person in the whole court, including the king himself in his final months, who was given opiates: he received multiple prescriptions of "diacodion," made from poppies. He was also the only person given mandrake, a poisonous and hallucinogenic plant that was used in the sixteenth century as a painkiller and sedative of last resort.³¹ The Tudor physician William Turner warned his colleagues to administer mandrake only in extreme cases ("to them that can not slepe / and to them that are in great payn / & to such as must be burned or cut in som place / that they should not fele the burning or cuttyng") and to be wary of overdose.³² After sporadic treatment with these and other drugs in the last months of 1546, there are two days of unusually complex prescriptions and high doses on 10 and 11 January 1547. The page then concludes with an accounting of the total cost and the signatures of two witnesses. That seems to have been the end for Mr Hylle the Synger, who was no longer among the "syngers" of the Privy Chamber at the coronation of Edward VI the following month. The new luggage allowance in 1544 could simply have been a courtesy as the royal musicians prepared to travel to France in attendance on the king, but it is also possible that Hills might have begun experiencing some difficulties with his health and was no longer able to manage his own "bed or trunck" on a logistically complex international journey. In either case, the utopian idealism of the Eltham ordinances did not last long amid the realities of the itinerant court.

The French military campaign of 1544 appears to have become something of a turning point in the treatment of itinerant singing groups. An even more dramatic international adventure had taken place at the Tudor court a few decades earlier. In that case, the singers on the road were not English, but members of the Habsburg-Burgundian *grande chapelle*, a world-class choir including the composers Alexander Agricola and Pierre de la Rue, travelling in the royal entourage of Philip the Fair and Juana of Aragon and Castile. The whole itinerant Habsburg court, musicians and all, suffered a shipwreck in 1506

³⁰ TNA, SP 1/228, fol. 157.

³¹ Hunter, "'To Cause Sleepe Safe and Shure'," 480.

³² Turner, *First and Seconde Partes of the Herbal*, 46.

while attempting to sail through the English Channel in a January storm.³³ Philip reported in a letter sent from Windsor on 1 February 1506 that “we lost none of our people except two singers of our chapel and a few minor officers of our company, a very small number, who, in evacuating the large ships to go ashore, and hastening too much, were drowned.”³⁴ The rest of the Habsburg retinue found themselves washed up on the Dorset coast. They were soon invited to join Henry VII in residence at Windsor. Festive masses and evensongs were celebrated (although we do not know whether the *grande chapelle* took an active part in these services), effusive vows of friendship were made, and when Henry removed from Windsor to Richmond, his royal visitors and their singers simply followed him there, taken up into the early-Tudor cycle of leisurely winter itinerancy.³⁵

This unplanned six-week encounter is somewhat less known and less discussed than the stage-managed meeting fourteen years later at the Field of Cloth of Gold, where we are given more detail about the music. The English and French royal chapels collaborated in a festive outdoor mass in June 1520. They alternated musical movements and never sang together; they even divided up the plainsong introit, which was sung first by the English and then repeated, as the rubrics required, by the French. This unusual arrangement was not made by Wolsey and the other producers of the spectacle, but by the singers themselves: “accordé entre les chantres de france & dangleterre.”³⁶ The veneer of international bonhomie was often a thin one at the highest levels—Philip the Fair was ultimately a hostage in England, not a guest, and Henry VIII and Francis I were not friends—but musicians seem to have been entrusted with a surprising degree of cooperation and autonomy during this sort of event. They were expected to “arrange things among” themselves in a way that was fair and flattering to both sides.

Political tensions could run high even when an individual singer went on the road alone, or when the distances travelled were a matter of hours rather than months. One story that became a mainstay of English Protestant lore (thanks to the indefatigable research of John Foxe, who collected almost 20,000 words of eyewitness testimony from the musician John Merbecke in his later years) recounts what happened in late Henrician Windsor when a distinguished visitor joined in with the choir of St George’s Chapel during

³³ Dumitrescu, *Early Tudor Court*, 34.

³⁴ Gachard and Piot, *Collection des voyages*, 503.

³⁵ Tighe and Davis, *Annals of Windsor*, vol. 1, 443.

³⁶ *Lordonnance et ordre du tournoy*, fol. 19r.

the preparations for the annual Garter feast.³⁷ The itinerant singer in question, Robert Philips, was a bass of the Chapel Royal who seems to have been in the habit of making guest appearances with other choirs and expecting a particularly grand musical repertory to be laid on for him "wheresoeuer he came."³⁸ He met his match in the form of Robert Testwood, a brusque and radical evangelical singing-man who was a member of the choir of St George's from 1534 until 1543. Testwood had little time for the music that had been "set vp" for this particular occasion, the motet *Lauda vivi Alpha et O* by the court composer Robert Fayrfax (1464–1521), which invoked the Virgin Mary in unrestrained terms as "*redemptrix et saluatric*," redeemer and saviour.³⁹ Foxe tells the tale in his *Acts and Monuments*:

Robert Phillips was so notable a singing man (wherein he gloryed) that wheresoeuer he came, the best and longest song, with most counteruurses in it, shuld be set vp at his commyng. And so his chaunce beyng now to be at Windsore, agaynst hys comming to the Antheme, a long song was set vp, called Lauda viui. In which song there was one counteruerse toward the end, that began on this wise, O redemptrix & saluatric. Which verse of all other, Robert Phillips woulde sing, because he knew that Testwood could not abide that dittie. Now Testwood knowing his mynd well enough, ioyned with him at the other part: and when he heard Robert Phillips begin to fetch his flourish with O redemptrix & saluatric: repeating the same one in anothers neck, Testwood was as quicke on the other side to answer hym agayne with Non redemptrix, nec saluatric, and so striuyng there with O and Non, who should haue the maistrie, they made an ende of the verse. Whereat was good laughyng in sleeues of some, but Robert Phillips with other of Testwoods enimies were sore offended.⁴⁰

There is much to be said about this story, but it is worth considering here as a complex moment of encounter between two singers from two different (though closely enmeshed) royal establishments. Testwood had settled in Windsor as a singer of St George's Chapel, a foundation entirely separate from the court in the strict sense, but he was familiar with the Chapel Royal, having served for many years as a young chorister there. He wrote to Cromwell in the early 1530s that "I was childe in this kynges fathers chappell by the terme of vij yeres & more in his latter dayse."⁴¹ Those seven years and more in the latter days of

³⁷ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1210–1220.

³⁸ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1212.

³⁹ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1212.

⁴⁰ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1212.

⁴¹ TNA, SP 1/73, fol. 141r.

Henry VII almost certainly included the year 1506. Testwood would have witnessed, at close range, the extended stay of the Habsburg-Burgundian *grande chapelle* at the English court.

As it happens, Fayrfax's *Lauda vivi Alpha et O* was very much indebted to the sort of music cultivated by the *grande chapelle* and to its extended network of connections with francophone composers such as Mouton, Févin, and Josquin. The style of the motet changes quite abruptly "toward the end," just as it invokes the name of "glorious Henry the Eighth" ("*Henrico octavo inclito*"), and shortly before the appeal to the Virgin as "redeemer and saviour" that Testwood found so objectionable. At that point, Fayrfax abandons the prolix traditional style of the English votive antiphon and shifts to the fashionable musical language of the French court motet in the early sixteenth century: austere, lucid, transparent, often with just two parts being sung.⁴² The quintessential device in French court motets was a specialised form of rhetorical repetition: "two successive duos identical but for octave register."⁴³ That is an exact description of the passage of music that Testwood sabotaged by chiming in "at the other part" with a mocking distortion of the text, protesting that Mary was neither redeemer nor saviour. It was a bold moment to interrupt an itinerant Chapel Royal singer in a court motet composed in the king's honour. The ostentatiously Frenchified clarity of the text at that point only made the disruption clearer. The story also suggests that these large polyphonic works sung in Tudor royal foundations were more than abstract sonic wallpaper. At least some people were paying attention to the text being sung. When they heard it subverted, there "was good laughyng in sleeues"; when they were insulted and distressed by this, there were heresy investigations. The "*Non redemptrix*" incident seems to have been a turning point of sorts in the picaresque career of Testwood, a career that ended a few years later with burning at the stake.

Itinerancy was a way of life for the "notable ... singing man" Robert Philips.⁴⁴ He was one of the singers who accompanied Wolsey on his journey to France in 1527, while still remaining on the regular roster of the Chapel—a feat of pluralism that was more challenging for musicians than for clergy. In this particular case, Wolsey seems to have practiced what he preached in the Eltham ordinances. On his expedition to France in 1521,

⁴² Bokulich, "Contextualizing Josquin's *Ave Maria*," 195; Hall, "Brumel's *Laudate Dominum* and the 'French-Court' Motet," 34–36.

⁴³ Rifkin, "Black Hole," 24.

⁴⁴ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1212.

he had taken ten professional singers with him as his private riding chapel. In 1527, the year after he drew up the ordinances, he took only four.⁴⁵

This second journey is well documented in George Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*. Cavendish's account also offers a glimpse of the sort of diplomatic briefing a group of gentlemen servants might be given as they embarked on a series of politically volatile encounters. "[W]han all his trayn & Cariages ware londed at Calice And euey thyng prepared in a redynes for his Iourney / he called byfore hyme all his noble men and gentilmen in to his pryve chamber."⁴⁶ There were three items on Wolsey's agenda. First, he thanked his staff, including Philips the singer, for their "dyligent seruyce" and promised them "condygn thankes & rewardes." Second, he reminded them that the king had "of his Royall dignytie assigned me in this Iourney to be his lieutenaunt generall / And ... for my part I must by vertue of my commyssion of leutenauntshipe Assume & take vppon me in all honour and degrees to haue all suche seruyce & reuerence as to his hyghnes presence is mete & dewe."⁴⁷ In other words, Wolsey was acting not just as the king's representative but as the king's person; while the cardinal was on French soil, his was a royal household, and the gentlemen were told "not to forgett the same" and to behave accordingly or risk "Indignacion." Third and last was an attempt by Wolsey to lighten the atmosphere with a little xenophobic joking. The French "wylbe at the first metyng as ffamylier with you as they had byn acquayntyd with you long byfore" and will "commyn with you in the frenche tong as thoughe ye vnderstode euey word they spoke," so—he told his household—return their rudeness and speak only English to them in reply. Then "my lord spekyng merely to oon of the gentilmen there (beyng a welsheman) sayd Rice / quod he / speke thou welshe to hyme / And I ame well assured that thy welshe shall be more defuse to hyme / than his frenche shall be to the."⁴⁸ The meeting was then, mercifully, adjourned.

A useful parallel to Wolsey's instruction can be found in another briefing given to a group of Henrician singers at a moment of high political tension. This story was told to John Foxe by his informant Merbecke, the organist and singer of Windsor, who, like Cavendish in Calais, was personally in attendance at the meeting. The setting was the chapter house of St George's, Windsor, where the "ministers of the colledge, from the

⁴⁵ Bowers, "Cultivation and Promotion," 182, fn. 17.

⁴⁶ Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, 46–47.

⁴⁷ Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, 47.

⁴⁸ Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey*, 48. This Welshman named "Rice" was another member of Wolsey's chapel staff, his chaplain Robert ap Rhys.

highest to the lowest" were summoned at "eyght of clock in the mornyng" on 4 November 1534 and were told by their dean Richard Sampson "that the Acte of the Kynges Suprymacy passed in the parliament house" the previous day. Sampson, like Wolsey, began by praising his chapel staff and commending "their diligence in tendyng the Quire." He then announced the break with Rome and declared that anyone who resisted it "should not only loose the benefit of that house, but be reputed as an vtter enemy to God and to the king." Finally, after the flattery and the threat, there was the practical instruction: all the papal indulgences posted in the church were "to be brought into the Chapterhouse, and cast into the chimney, and burnt." From that day onward, ideological divisions would deepen among the Windsor singing-men and clergy, leading eventually to the disruption that took place when a grand royal motet was "set vp" for a visiting singer from court.⁴⁹

Yet another meeting of this type took place at the London Charterhouse in the early 1530s, after the singing had fallen apart in the dark during the night office. "One side of the choir went astray" during Psalm 117, at a point of irregularity and repetition (*Dextera Domini fecit virtutem...*) that was treacherous to sing from memory.⁵⁰ John Houghton, the prior of the monastery, called everyone into the chapter house as soon as it was daylight. Houghton was an exacting man, even by the rarefied standards of the Carthusians, and he did not tolerate poor singing in his community. He had been seen to leave his place in choir to exhort the cantors to sing more slowly, and he once walked out of the church when he heard the pitch of the chant sink too low.⁵¹ Unlike Wolsey and Sampson, he skipped the flattery, moving straight to admonition and action: "Oh, beloved brothers, what have we done this night? ... We have erred through our negligence and disregard. We have done carelessly what we ought to do best."⁵² He then went on to give an order that, from now on, candles must always be lit in the choir during the chanting of psalms. This anecdote was preserved by someone who—once again—had been present in the meeting: the English Carthusian monk Maurice Chauncy, who was by now singing his psalms in exile in the Low Countries. He told the tale in one of his hagiographical works, not because he was preoccupied with the details of Tudor plainsong performance (however fascinating those may be to us) but as a moral vignette to show the integrity and severity of Houghton, who

⁴⁹ Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1211.

⁵⁰ Chauncy, *Historia aliquot martyrum*, 56; Hendriks, *London Charterhouse*, 88–90.

⁵¹ Chauncy, *Historia aliquot martyrum*, 55–56.

⁵² Chauncy, *Historia aliquot martyrum*, 56–57.

was executed in 1535 for refusal to submit to the royal supremacy. It was a mere prelude to what Chauncy considered to be the Real Story.

Historians of the Tudor court might well ask why we would even want to study the peregrinations and misadventures of singers when that time could be spent paying attention to the Real Story. There was certainly an underlying attitude in some sixteenth-century circles that singers were a generic, interchangeable population, just part of the furniture, more “decorative” (to use Roger Bowers’s term) than functional.⁵³ The installation feast in 1504 of William Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, featured a masterpiece of Tudor culinary kitsch: a monumental confection of “a quyer with syngyng men in surplesses ... with a booke written and noted,” all sculpted out of marzipan and sugar.⁵⁴ Philip the Fair wrote home from far-away Windsor in 1506, just a few days after surviving his shipwreck: all was well, no real losses, just *deux chantres de nostre chapelle* as minor collateral damage.⁵⁵

The lives of itinerant singers are still well worth investigating, I would argue, not least because singing on the road—as we have seen at some length in this article—could also be a formidable site of controversy, ambition, and power. It is no great surprise to see Henry VIII composing two polyphonic masses on his first summer progress, in between some wrestling and some strategic beheading.

⁵³ Bowers, *Choral Institutions Within the English Church*, 2030, 4052.

⁵⁴ Warner, *Antiquitates Culinariae*, 114.

⁵⁵ Gachard and Piot, *Collection des voyages*, 503.

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