

The Emergence of the Tambourine in Early Renaissance Concerted Music

Jason Haaheim

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Dr. Patricia Kazarow
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There is a certain thrill one experiences when seeing a performance of Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite." This is especially heightened if one is a percussionist. An almost quotidian orchestral excerpt, the unbridled use of the tambourine during the *trepak* evokes riotous dance and rustic amusement. Indeed, the tambourine is one of many percussion instruments rooted in folk tradition, and composers have harnessed its pastoral percussive color to great success from Mozart to Kodály (Blades, "Tambourine" 553). The tambourine became a popular folk instrument in the Middle Ages, and its development and subsequent emergence into concerted Western music can be traced over two millennia.

In the current literature, there is no explanation for the tambourine's inclusion in concerted music. That it was used in Arabian lands during the Middle Ages is certainly documented, and its prevalence in medieval European folk traditions is evident in historical writings and iconography. But, as yet, there is no theory that explains its emergence as a concerted instrument. The literature contains little that describes exactly why these common medieval percussion instruments (and specifically the tambourine) began to be included alongside the other "legitimate" (i.e., included in medieval concerted music) instruments like the shawm, the sackbut, or the viols. James Blades presents only an ambiguous statement regarding the tambourine's emergence in this concerted music: "[the tambourine] was in many respects a rustic instrument.... In the late Middle Ages it was given a part in concerted music" ("Tambourine" 553). Why? What prompted this instrument's inclusion in planned musical performances? Blades further states that "the tambourine was popular throughout the Middle Ages in all parts of Europe" (553). While the instrument was already well known and used, something momentous catalyzed its inclusion in concerted music.

I will argue that this paradigm shift was a direct result of European nobles' exposure to Arabic percussion instruments during the Crusades—that prolonged contact with the Middle East, through trade and war, facilitated an influx of new ideas, literature, and musical instruments leading to the tambourine's incorporation in early Renaissance concerted music. We know that ancient Arabic music and practices engendered the medieval percussion instruments, and that these instruments were used extensively in European folk music throughout the Middle Ages. However, none of this music was written down, so specific information regarding techniques, parts, and influences is elusive. What we do know is that there is a time frame within which these instruments were given

parts in concerted music; I will demonstrate that there is a direct correlation between their inclusion and the advent of the Crusades.

To substantiate this view I will first show that the tambourine was endemic to Arabian lands and was active in the music performed there during and after the Crusades. (The tambourine was not alone; a close family of percussion instruments including the kettledrums, tabor, nakers, triangle, and cymbals were also actively used in the Middle East.) Second, I will clarify the historical time frame and influence of the Crusades, thereby establishing that the Crusades were the catalyst for the tambourine's inclusion in concerted music; as Europeans were exposed to Arabic instruments and techniques, they incorporated them into their planned performances. This idea is pivotal; this influence caused a stark shift in the instruments included in these performances. From its prevalent use as a rustic dance instrument, the tambourine successfully crossed the peasant/noble boundary. Third, I will provide historical evidence of the tambourine's inclusion in concerted music. I will cite specific instances of its use in liturgical and court music, and show that these events correlate to the influence of the Crusades. I will proceed to indicate the types of music in which the tambourine was used, and how this affected its character as an instrument. Finally, I will explore the social aspects of this inclusion. There were certainly musicians who played the tambourine: who were these percussionist musicians? Who influenced and taught them? How did they arrive in that profession? (e.g., Were the percussionists wandering gypsies "filling in" on tambourine for the night, or were they young Franco-Flemish men apprenticing to become master tambourinists?) I will detail how these musicians were regarded socially.

Few musical instruments are as ubiquitous as percussion. Drums are the most ancient musical instrument and their use in social traditions, dance, and warfare predates recorded history. The tambourine is no exception. Its origins lie well before written history; they are somewhat ambiguous because the tambourine is still found in use among the most ancient nations of the world. Identifying a specific place of origin requires comparison of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Indian histories. It is an instrument which was widely disseminated during antiquity—it appears in Roman sculptures, Greek vases, Indian manuscripts, and the Old Testament (Blades, "Tambourine" 553). Judaic tradition makes numerous references to the *toph* (timbrel) from *Genesis* to *Ezekiel*.

"The origin of musical instruments among the Arabs must certainly have occurred in the misty past preceding the time from which it is possible to trace their civilization...3000 B.C." (Blades, *Percussion History* 183). Throughout the early part of the first millennium, however, the tambourine gained popularity in the Arabian peninsula. Compared to Roman Europe or India, the Middle East became a center of the tambourine's musical

development. Extraordinary playing techniques developed, and the tambourine was employed in many forms of ceremony and dance. “In Arabia and Iran frame drums (*duff*), round and rectangular, appear as early as pre-Islamic times...” (Blades, “Tambourine” 553). The tambourine was then developed and used extensively. “[In Arabia, the tambourine] seems to be well established at this period (the early part of the seventh century)” (Blades, *Percussion History* 184). In fact, the tambourine became such a staple instrument of Arabian custom that “during a period of musical inactivity enforced in the 7th century by the prophet Mohammed, approval was given to the...tambourine [exclusively]...” (553).

Therefore, “we acquired our percussion instruments from the Middle East...” (Montagu, *Percussion Techniques* 20). Besides the tambourine, many other unknown percussion instruments were being actively used in Arabic lands during the early Middle Ages. Instruments such as the kettledrums, tabor, nakers, triangle, and cymbals originated in the Middle East and were eventually assimilated into the European percussion arsenal. With some instruments, their names alone “reveal that they came from the Islamic world: the lute, the rebec, the canon, the añafil, the shawm, the nakers” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 22).

The tambourine had several historical aliases. In Hebrew it is known as *toph*. Indo-European derivations include *tamburin*, *schellentrommel*, *tambourino*, *cembalo*, *tamburo basco*, *tambour de Basque*, *tymbre*, *timbre*, and *timbrel* (Blades, *Percussion History* 197). The Basque region of Spain is eponymous to the Italian *tamburo basco* and French *tambour de Basque*. (The Basques were a group of Muslims inhabiting eastern Spain during the early Middle Ages.) However, the tambourine did not arrive in Europe via Spain because “the instrument is not Basquish” (197). That the tambourine arrived in Europe via Middle Eastern culture is unquestioned: “the timbre, the ancestor of the Jacobean timbrel and of our tambourine, was one of the commonest drums in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and is [an] instrument which we acquired from the Middle East...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 46). Already during the early Middle Ages, the tambourine was a mainstay in Europe. “[It] was popular throughout the Middle Ages in all parts of Europe” (Blades, “Tambourine” 553). Its popularity was surely strengthened because it was an uncomplicated drum. Simple and ideal for rustic use, it required little maintenance and was not nearly as difficult to craft as a shawm. “The commonest medieval type [of tambourine] was similar to the tambourine known today, and even closer to the Turkish instruments of the 19th century” (Blades, “Tambourine” 553). It has actually changed very little over a thousand years.

Thus we find that percussion instruments of the Middle Ages were “mainly those imported from non-European sources” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 51). During this time period, Europeans adopted Middle

Eastern percussion instruments. Eventually, some of the instruments were adapted to a more European taste – “In the later Middle Ages, they were adapted and modified to such an extent that they became clearly and recognizably distinct from their Moorish origins” (51) – but the tambourine remained essentially unmodified and its use was widespread. However, it must be stressed that even though the tambourine was common in Europe, it was not necessarily deemed worthy of a part in concerted music. That kind of inclusion would require a paradigm shift; the Crusades provided this necessary influence.

With Middle Eastern influence, instrument modification, and evolving musical styles, the instrumental world of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance was highly dynamic:

Woodcuts by artists such as Hans Burgkamair and Albrecht Dürer...executed in the last seven years of [the reign of Emperor Maximilian I], between 1512 and 1519...show us how radically the range of musical instruments had altered in less than a century. This period, between 1450 and 1500, is one of the great watersheds; a man who lived in this time would, in his childhood, have heard the sounds of medieval instruments and in his old age the sounds of the Renaissance.... It is our good fortune that the first of these epochs which saw, or rather heard, the entire sound of instrumental music change, coincided with the development of printing and with the thirst for knowledge at all levels of the community rather than just among the upper classes. (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 86)

This thirst for knowledge, this desire for exotic sophistication and cosmopolitanism was born in the Crusades.

The macroscopic timeframe of the Crusades was 1095 to 1291. Pope Urban II released a Papal bull declaring a crusade against the infidels; after lengthy European logistics, the First Crusade departed in 1095. What followed was a series of attempts to retake the Holy Land, seize precious religious relics, establish Christian outposts in Arabian lands, and increase the prestige of individual European nobles. In 1291 the last Christians were expelled from their bases in Syria. A gradual withdrawal from the Middle East ensued. While these dates define the official Crusades, the actual boundaries are vague. There were many recurring episodes with the Muslims after 1291. However, what followed were not really crusades in the old sense but smaller campaigns such as the crusades of Nicopolis in 1396 and Varna in 1444, whose purpose was to defend Europe against the Ottoman Turks, a new power in the East (“The Crusades”). That there were no “official” crusades after 1291 is inconsequential to this argument—1095 marks the beginning of European exposure to the Middle East that was intense and dramatic during the Crusades, and which continued thereafter through trade and skirmishes with the Ottoman Turks.

From this timeframe we see that even as early as 1095 an “Arabian Avenue” existed—a direct, decisive conduit of customs and culture. While still nascent in 1095, this avenue for influence was markedly different than the previously sporadic and vicarious exposure to Islam through the Byzantines. This direct exposure would only increase with European ambition.

The end of the 11th century was an era of great European confidence. With papal authority increasing, Pope Urban II convened the council of Clermont to address pressing issues in the east: Europe’s eastern Christian neighbors were being threatened on all fronts by conquering Muslims, and the holy city of Jerusalem was, regrettably, controlled by the Arabs.

The era of Clermont witnessed the concurrence of three significant developments: first, there existed as never before a popular religious fervor that was not without marked eschatological tendencies in which the Holy City of Jerusalem figured prominently; second, war against the infidel had come to be regarded as a religious undertaking, a work pleasing to God; and finally, from an organizational standpoint, ecclesiastical as well as secular, western Europe possessed the capacity to plan such an enterprise and carry it through. (“The Crusades”)

Europe was just beginning to pull out of the “Dark Ages.” It was developing a thriving trade based on the feudal system of land ownership. Kings and kingdoms were consolidating power. Princes and nobles controlled organized armies, and were given a religious purpose and a common enemy. These conditions enabled the Crusades.

However, while the Crusades were initiated with primarily spiritual motives, “an almost immediate result was the establishment of European colonies in the Middle East. As in all colonial enterprises, trade followed the flag and merchants, particularly the Venetians, were able to set up their own trading bases in the Levant under the protection of the Crusaders...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 22). In the Middle East, contact with local culture and customs was becoming very direct. However, this was not the only geographic area of influence:

From the eighth century, Spain had been occupied by the Muslims; now other Muslim lands were occupied by Europeans. There were thus two points of contact with the Islamic world, a world which had retained many of the arts and sciences of Greek and Roman civilisation which had been lost in the European Dark Ages. Because of the [European] desire for new knowledge, these contacts bore rapid fruit.... With learning and with the sciences came the arts of literature and music. (22)

Contact with Islam stoked the European thirst for a foreign, cosmopolitan culture—a culture which had retained much of what Europe had lost. It is an interesting dichotomy: this culture was religiously deplored and considered barbaric, yet it was simultaneously admired for the sophistication of its arts and letters. Along with spices, coffee, and merchant wares, Europeans emulated Arabian music. “The Arabians...were intensely fond of musical instruments and wrote enthusiastically about them” (Blades, *Percussion History* 184). The crusading nobles adopted these ideas and customs because it was fashionable to do so. On a secondary level, one could accurately describe the Crusades as a shopping trip for sophistication-starved Europeans.

The musical instruments the European crusaders brought back were quickly accepted in aristocratic and ecclesiastical circles. Minstrels and troubadours were accompanied by instruments, and at this time, “many of these instruments were new. New instruments came from across the Pyrenees; others were brought back from the Middle East as the armies and the traders travelled [sic] to and fro.... These and others can be seen still in use in that world today and can be seen in European art from the twelfth century onwards” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 22). The tambourine’s inclusion in concerted music happened because of the influence of the Crusades, and the subsequent exposure of the European nobility to the Middle East, especially through new trade. “It was the merchant class which constituted a unique addition to the mediaeval social world...they became the focus for urban economic life” (Bowles 21), and with this focus trade with the Middle East carried great influence:

The sectors acquired by burgeoning Italian cities in the crusader states enabled them to extend their trade with the Muslim world and led to the establishment of trade depots beyond the Crusade frontiers, some of which lasted well beyond 1291. The transportation they provided was significant in the development of shipbuilding techniques. Italian banking facilities became indispensable to popes and kings. Catalans and Provençals also profited, and, indirectly, so did all of Europe. Moreover, returning crusaders brought new tastes and increased the demand for spices, Oriental textiles, and other exotic fare. (“The Crusades”)

The tambourine’s acceptance was not immediate, as it was not formally included in concerted court music until the reign of Henry VIII (r. 1509-47) (Blades, “Tambourine” 553). However, the definite shift in European perspective regarding this formerly rustic instrument was an undeniable result of Middle Eastern exposure during the Crusades; the tambourine crossed the mental boundaries designating certain instruments as “rustic” (i.e., only for peasant use) to become a “legitimate” instrument worthy of concerted performance.

Continued exposure to Arabic percussion occurred as a result of the conquests of the Ottoman Turks. “Timpani were newly imported from the east, the result once again of war between Christians and Muslims...an attempt by the Turks to overrun eastern Europe after their conquest of Constantinople” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 108). The timpani perfectly exemplify this idea of exposure followed by inclusion. “Our present-day timpani had their rise in the Arabic kettledrums—*naqqâra*—which took the crusaders’ fancy and were adopted in European military music” (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 1). “The Turks carried their large kettledrums on camel-back; the Hungarians adopted the instruments and mounted them on horse-back and later chariots. They spread to all the courts of Europe and became the great emblems of state and royalty.... The first pair in England were imported by Henry VIII, probably in emulation of Maximilian [I of Germany]” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 108). For purporting such hatred of their infidel enemies, the European nobles were surprisingly receptive to their musical instruments, and practices thereof:

From the eleventh century onwards there is ample evidence of the use of small kettledrums as military instruments...they were regarded as a symbol of feudal rank and prestige. In the East at the time of the First Crusade no military force was complete without its retinue of musicians including trumpets and drums. A reference to the use of trumpets and drums in Saracenic martial music is found in the famous *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100). In subsequent epic poems describing the First Crusade numerous references are made to the use of the drum and other percussion, and from various accounts it seems that the crusaders lost little time in emulating the practices of their opponents.... (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 1)

Further support for the idea of the “Arabian Avenue” is found in examining the history of the triangle. Prior to the 11th century, the triangle was unknown in Europe. Then, “the triangle makes its first appearance [during the Crusades], sometimes as a plain three-sided or trapezoidal instrument, but more often with rings on the horizontal bar.... Both triangular and trapezoidal forms survived into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 49).

The Romans were known for their assimilation of other cultures, including their religions, scholarly traditions, customs, and music. Under Alexander the Great and subsequent rulers, the vast Persian Empire endured for nearly half a millenium as a sophisticated, cosmopolitan civilization; the high degree of sophistication was primarily maintained by Alexander’s desire to absorb and assimilate other cultures. It does not seem unreasonable, therefore, to extend this idea to the crusading European Christians: not only were they exposed to Arabic customs

and music while marauding through southeastern Europe and the Arabian peninsula, the crusaders actually conquered and inhabited Jerusalem during the First Crusade (“The Crusades”). This habitation of foreign lands provided the ideal vehicle for cultural exposure and assimilation of Arabic musical ideas; once the crusading nobles saw the tambourine first hand, they no longer would have relegated it to the domain of simple peasant instruments. They would have desired its inclusion in secular and sacred music. Previously, the tambourine was used for its rhythmic capabilities and festive character in rustic dance music, but nobility and aristocracy viewed the tambourine as a bucolic peasant toy. However, during the late Middle Ages—the era of the crusades’ influence—a diametric shift in thinking occurred: instead of strict relegation to the realm of a peasant dance instrument, the tambourine gained acceptance in some forms of festive liturgical music and concerted court music.

The Crusades dramatically altered the face of Europe. Mathematics, science, literature, and music were irrevocably changed by Arabian influence. Further, “Europe's fear of Muslim power was such that the Crusade idea persisted well into the 17th century, and the conviction that, in certain circumstances, war might be ‘just’ became more deeply enrooted in the conscience of the West.... This is one of the most enduring results of the movement” (“The Crusades”).

With the Crusades’ influence well established I will now specifically address the nature of the tambourine’s emergence in concerted literature, and the evidence supporting this process. “It can be stated as something more than an assumption that there was instrumental music of a high order in the fifteenth century. The perfection of the instruments of the period has already been mentioned, and their musical quality is now a proved fact” (Hayes 38). Though still dwarfed by the juggernaut of vocal music, instrumental music was anything but ragged and undeveloped. It was not limited to rustic dance music; it was being given concerted forms, and new instruments were being included.

Throughout the era of the Hundred Years War (1348-1453), the bourgeoisie began to emerge as musically influential. “The rise of towns and development of a powerful urban class ended the neat, tripartite division of mediaeval society and profoundly altered both the economic and social fabric and intellectual values of the late Middle Ages” (Bowles 21). Clergy and nobility no longer universally dominated. The liturgical use of Masses that parodied or paraphrased secular music only strengthens this assertion. In this transitional period – the end of the Medieval era and the beginning of the Renaissance – the church remained the bastion of performed music; this was followed by a growing trend of aristocratic patrons. However, “the prosperous wool merchants of England who built so many great churches, the traders and merchants of the Hanseatic League and of the Italian city-states wished to

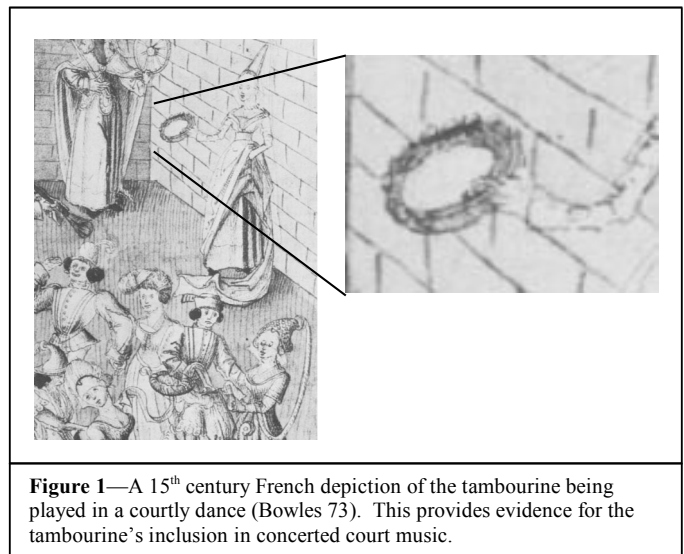
perform and hear music just as much as the princes and the bishops of the courtly establishments” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 54). During this time, a secular element began to weave its way into the musical scene. “The gradual decline of feudalism was met with a corresponding increase in the importance of the middle class, town life and the entry of the guilds into positions of economic, political, and artistic control. Both cultural patronage and entertainment for the first time passed into bourgeois hands” (Bowles 21). Highly regarded composers produced chansons and secular dance music. Rusticity became “trendy,” or at least permissible, in the musical scene. When coupled with the influence of the cosmopolitan Middle East, there was an extraordinary drive to include percussion instruments in concerted music. Due to the influence of the Crusading nobility, these instruments were no longer regarded as mere peasant toys.

Berthold Neumman has researched the topic of percussion in Renaissance music, specifically dance music. Citing early 16th century treatises by Virdung and Michael Praetorius, he states that “the employment of percussion for polyphonic dance music of the Renaissance is...unsupported by historical evidence. The surviving sources speak collectively against this modern practice” (87). This is a peculiarity of the extant source material because percussion instruments were definitely being used in Europe at that time. “Percussion instruments had been described and depicted previously in treatises by several authors, including Virdung (1511), Schlick (1511), and Martin Agricola (1528)” (Stolba 218). Is it then possible that Virdung and Praetorius simply forgot to mention the percussion instruments’ inclusion in dance music, or deemed their employment outside of consideration for their treatises? This was likely the case, for Neumman promptly negates his former statement: “[However,] even if the named written sources of the Renaissance bring us no evidence for the use of percussion in polyphonic dance music, one cannot deny that the iconographic evidence lets us conclude there was a lively use of drums, tambourines, and other percussion at this time” (89). Figure 1 shows definitive evidence of the tambourine in use in a concerted court dance setting; this 15th century French painting depicts a woman entertaining a group of well-dressed French nobles (Bowles 73).

Most knowledge of instruments in the Early Middle Ages and the Crusades derives from these illustrations in manuscripts and carvings in churches—iconography. As with all historical evidence, one must consider their reliability. Neumman points out that “the instrumental combinations revealed in these pictures may not be counted on as reflective of real practice. The large number of paintings and graphic works that represent maxims, philosophical ideas, or spiritual events can be misinterpreted as depictions of reality” (89). Rather than being true portraits of the time, they may be idealized pictures. However, Montagu argues that there is another historical

element strengthening the documents' reliability: "[manuscript illustrations] show instruments which were used, and some indeed are still used as folk instruments but which did not enter the main stream of European music" (*Medieval Instruments* 23). This idea is vital: examining the history of instruments which were not mainstream lends credence to the depiction of instruments that were. Further, by examining concurrent instrumental development in other geographic areas one can confirm or deny the accuracy of historical illustrations:

Most of the instruments in the *Cantigas* [*de Santa Maria*, c. 1270, a book of poems written



by King Alfonso X of Spain] derive from the Muslim world and many of them are clearly ancestral to instruments which were used throughout Europe in the succeeding centuries. We in Europe are incurable meddlers and are always trying to change things to see whether we can make them work better or differently, so that our instruments, along with all our other artifacts, are ever changing. In other parts of the world, people prefer to leave things as they are and to perfect their use, rather than to change their form. Thus, although many of these instruments have changed very considerably in Europe, we can still find many instruments identical with those illustrated in the *Cantigas* in other areas which have also drawn their culture from the Muslim world. Comparison between these surviving instruments and the illustrations confirms the general reliability of this source and the accuracy of its miniatures. (23)

It is fortunate, then, that the iconography can be trusted. Regardless of validity issues, these illustrated manuscripts and carvings remain essentially the only evidence from that time period. Knowledge of technique and performance is left to logical conjecture.

We know that the tambourine was popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Further historical evidence will provide a timeframe in which the tambourine was included in liturgical and court concerted music. This timeframe directly correlates to the advent of the Crusades. At least as early as the 11th century, the tambourine

appears in illuminated manuscripts; it continued to be depicted in secular artwork in *The Assumption of the Virgin* by Matteo di Giovanni (early 15th century).

Further examinations of early Middle Ages iconography show strong evidence for the tambourine's inclusion in liturgical concerted music. "In the psalters...there is usually an introductory picture, often illustrating King David and his musicians.... There are frequently illustrations showing musicians accompanying, particularly, Psalms 81 [and 149] (...timbrel [tambourine], harp, psaltery, trumpet), and 150 (...trumpet, psaltery, harp, timbrel



[tambourine], stringed instruments, organs, cymbals)" (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 15). In fact, the tambourine may have been an accepted element of liturgical music as early as the late 13th century.

Figure 2 shows "the label-mould carvings (c. 1290-1315, Guild of Musicians) in Beverly Minster...[which illustrate] a remarkably clear representation of...a player on the tambourine" (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 3).



Further, an early 14th century illustration from the English *Book of Hours* (Figure 3) shows a woman playing the tambourine (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 14). It is

Figure 3—Woman playing tambourine from early 14th century English Book of Hours (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 14). This shows ecclesiastical use less than 50 years after the Crusades.

significant that the tambourine is depicted in these ecclesiastical settings less than 50 years after the end of the Crusades; I argue that this not a simple coincidence—the direct influence of the crusades precipitated the tambourine's inclusion in liturgical concerted music.

Why was the tambourine chosen to be included in liturgical concerted music when other non-Arabic instruments were neglected? First, the influence of the clergy traveling with the crusaders cannot be underestimated. High-ranking clergy routinely accompanied European Nobles on crusades. Raymond of Saint-Gilles (b. 1041-42, d. 1105), the count of Toulouse, led the largest army of the First Crusade. "He was the oldest and most prominent of the crusading princes, and he aspired and perhaps expected to become the leader of the entire expedition. He was accompanied by Adhémar, bishop of Le Puy, whom the Pope had named as legate for the Crusade" ("The Crusades"). It would be naive to assume that the clergy were unsusceptible to the Arabian influence felt by the nobles and the traders; upon seeing the tambourine used in the Middle East they would have desired its inclusion in Europe. Second, the tambourine carried religious significance. "It was the timbre [tambourine], rather than any

other type of drum, which was almost invariably portrayed in bibles and psalters to represent the word *tympanum* in the Latin text” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 46). Prior to the Crusades, clergy may have been uneasy with the idea of including a rustic instrument in their liturgical music, despite its religious significance. But with the advent of strong Middle Eastern influence it became modish to include the tambourine.

We can presume that instruments, specifically percussion (and very probably the tambourine), were fully included in liturgical concerted music prior to 1542. This is based on the proceedings of the Council of Trent (1542-1563). The concerns of the council included “widespread use of musical instruments, especially ‘noisy’ ones, in church” (Stolba 202). This could easily imply percussion instruments. Montagu makes a strong case for this idea:

It has been suggested that because many popes and bishops inveighed against the use of instruments in church, they were obeyed and instruments were not used. However, it does not seem likely that such prohibitions were merely cautionary; they must have been against something that was actually happening. The use of instruments was forbidden because, and not in case, the clergy were using instruments, and the prohibitions had to be repeated again and again because, after a few years, the instruments crept back into use. We can therefore assume that bells and organs were not the only instruments to be heard in church services and that from time to time the fiddles, psalteries, lutes and gitterns and all the other instruments that we see used by the celestial choirs were used by earthly choirs also. (*Medieval Instruments* 50)

From this it seems quite certain that the tambourine was included in liturgical concerted music prior to 1542.

Concrete evidence of the tambourine’s inclusion in concerted court music is found in the imperial records of Henry VIII (r. 1509-47). Iconography shows that “the tambourine, like all the medieval percussion instruments, is frequently illustrated in the hands of angels, but in many respects it was a rustic instrument, associated with wandering minstrels, showmen, and jugglers” (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 15). This was the common conception of the instrument, at least in the minds of the nobility, until the influence of the Crusades. The tambourine then began to be included in liturgical concerted music. Whether or not it was included in forms of concerted court music before c. 1509 is unknown; illustrations such as Figure 1 suggest that it probably had been included before c. 1509, but we know with certainty that “in the Renaissance it was given a part in concerted music (Henry VIII had four tambourine players amongst his 79 musicians). [The tambourine] remained an integral ingredient of rhythmic music of many descriptions” (15).

From this point in history forward, the tambourine only gained more acceptance. It was canonized in the royal encyclopedia of instruments by François Merlin and Jacques Cellier. Produced for Henry III of France (r. 1574-1589), it illustrates “many instruments, among them a group of drums...distinguishing the French drum, the side drum, from the village drum, the pipe and tabor, and from the Basque drum, the timbrel or tambourine [also *Tabourin de Basque*], which is shown with pellet bells on the frame instead of the more usual miniature cymbal jingles” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 109).

With the tambourine’s inclusion in concerted music established, we are left to wonder the kind of music in which it was included. It is difficult to precisely identify because “practically none of the music was written for specific forces...performances were never fixed in the way that they are today. Far more music existed than has survived and even more was improvised and never written down.... With so little known about the music, it is not surprising that less is known about what the instruments played...” (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 50). However, we do know that “percussion instruments provided a rhythmic accompaniment to dance and other music...” (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 50). We also know that “some instruments were regarded as more suitable than others for some purposes; that dance music for instance, while it could be played on any instruments [sic], was usually [accompanied by percussion]...” (Blades, Montagu, *Percussion Instruments* 50).

Not only did percussion instruments perform concerted Renaissance dance music, they transcended the boundaries associated with the families of instruments. Early musical instruments were “divided into two groups that lasted through the Renaissance: the *instruments hauts* and the *instruments bas*, the loud and the soft, and, with the exception of the percussion...these groups seldom or never mixed” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 50). Consorts of instruments stayed “in the family”—whole consorts were preferred over broken consorts. But, as is often the modern case, percussion instruments exist within, around, and outside of the normal classification, allowing their inclusion in all kinds of music. This is only natural: percussionists (then and now) have amazing control of timbre and dynamic range. On the whole, percussion is a remarkably versatile instrument, capable of much greater variety and adaptation than a shawm or viol; “the reed instruments and the duct flutes, in particular, work only at a set air pressure and, if blown harder, play sharper as well as louder; blown more gently, they play flat as well as softly” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 50). This certainly hinders versatility, and subsequent consideration for a certain part in a consort of instruments. In order to include winds, definite criteria had to be met: is the dynamic level appropriate? Will the pitch resulting from this dynamic conflict with the other instruments? Percussion instruments

were not subject to such concerns—while the shawms and viols were limited in their concerted music capacity, the percussion instruments were able to be included in many different settings.

Yet there is no written music that exists to prove this until the early Baroque era. Reasons for this can be understood by examining the example of the timpani; a common setting for timpani was royal music. “In Germany, the Imperial Guild of Trumpeters and Kettledrummers was established by decree in 1528; its members guarded their craft and transmitted their performance secrets by rote from generation to generation. No doubt this kind of professional secrecy was partially responsible for the lack of notated music for percussion instruments” (Stolba 218).

Other instruments shared practices similar to the timpani. “In Renaissance Music, percussion instruments were used mainly for religious ceremonies, civic processions, military signals and encouragement, and dancing. If notated music was used, it has not survived; presumably, percussionists learned rudiments by rote and improvised music appropriate to the occasion” (Stolba 218). This practice of implied “planned-improvisation,” is likely the historical truth. As supported by statements about royal timpanists in the early 16th century, the percussionists were never given written parts but were expected to interpolate and produce a fitting accompaniment. “Little early timpani music has survived; the player was expected to concoct a bass part to fit what the trumpets were playing.... The normal convention...was to tune one drum to the keynote of the [trumpets’] music and the other to the dominant or fifth of the key, the equivalents of the trumpets’ 3rd and 4th harmonics” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 109).

We can therefore conclude that during the Renaissance, percussion instruments were included in myriad musical settings, but that their performance relied upon tradition, improvisation, and knowledge of standard rudiments. Written percussion parts do not proliferate until the early Baroque, and it is at this point in history that the tambourine mysteriously departs from the musical scene. “It is one of the puzzles of musical history that so popular a drum [the tambourine] should have fallen out of use in the later Renaissance, surviving as a folk instrument in southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, until it was recalled into the orchestra by the Romantic composers of the late nineteenth century...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 46).

With its various uses in concerted music understood, we now turn our attention to the musicians who played the tambourine—players who were necessarily linked with its emergence in concerted literature. Who were these percussionist musicians? “We acquired our percussion instruments from the Middle East but, save in the Iberian peninsula, there is no evidence at all that we acquired either players or music from the same area. With the exception of one Venetian painting which shows a visiting Turkish band, no musicians in Western Europe appear as

non-Europeans before the 18th century” (Montagu, *Percussion Techniques* 20). Thus all percussionists in western Europe from the early Middle Ages through the Baroque were native Europeans.

Unfortunately, the life of a percussionist during the Middle Ages and Renaissance was not filled with fame, glamour, and lucrative employment opportunities as it is today:

What records and illustrations there are of this period are scanty, but it is clear that the professional musicians were already regarded as low class, as rogues and vagabonds, as they were to remain even into modern times.... Neither before nor since has it been possible for the aristocratic musician to avoid being either *déclassé* or regarded as an incompetent amateur aping the professional, irrespective of his skill and proficiency. (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 19)

Montagu states a truly depressing historical fact. Essentially, a 16th century farmer would have much rather married his daughter to an up-and-coming executioner than a musician. However, this lack of respect could have been an important motivating factor in the formation of guilds. While a single “rogue” musician was trodden upon and ostracized, a group of musicians could exercise control and power. “Whereas in the earlier periods...[instrumental] music had, apart from a few royal or quasi-royal secular and ecclesiastical establishments, been a matter for individual minstrels wandering across Europe...in the latter part of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries, settled guilds of musicians became established in many of the towns of Europe...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 80). These Renaissance guilds bear a striking similarity to our establishments of organized labor in the United States. The unions, in most cases, empower the individual worker.

The guilds began to be formed, groups of musicians who established that they, and only they, had the right to play for certain, or sometimes for any, occasions. Such guilds naturally limited their membership to the number that the amount of work in the town could support and they made it very difficult for any newcomers to gain admittance. At the same time, they acted as a benevolent society towards their own membership, taking some care of their retired members and their widows and orphans. (80)

Thus the desolate life of a musician began to take on compassionate and desirable elements. This begins to explain how Renaissance percussionists arrived in their profession and maintained their station.

The normal way of admittance was by apprenticeship.... It might be the responsibility of the town council or the local land owner to provide the ceremonial instruments for official occasions, but the other instruments were usually the responsibility of the musicians themselves. This led to the

establishment of instrument-making concerns in the larger centers and, in due course, to guilds of instrument makers as well as of instrument players. (80)

Towards the end of the Renaissance, a substantial trend begins—we see the rise of the amateur musician, whose “importance to the historian of music and musical instruments is great, for it was for such musicians, especially the wealthy, that many composers wrote...” (Montagu, *Medieval Instruments* 80). These amateur musicians paved the way for the chamber music that dominated the social life of the 17th and 18th centuries, a genre that many Classical and Romantic composers favored over any other.

In this paper I have demonstrated how the tambourine emerged in the concerted music of western Europe. I have shown that the tambourine was endemic to Arabia from the 11th to the 15th centuries, the timeframe of interest correlating to the Crusades. Ostensibly, due to the Crusades and European exposure to Middle Eastern music, a diametric shift in thinking occurred. The paradigm of concerted music inclusion altered and the tambourine was promoted from a rustic peasant instrument to a necessary part of liturgical and court music. In this concerted music the tambourine occupied many musical roles due to its great versatility; it could have been heard in dance music, court festivals, popular chansons, liturgical Masses, and numerous other musical forms. I have further shown that a tambourine-playing percussionist began as a lower class entertainer, but later enjoyed greater power and status with the formation of guilds.

Thus, upon the next hearing of Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker Suite” or Dvorák’s “Carnival Overture,” one should pay great respect to the percussionist and his/her vibrant tambourine: the chronicle of its inclusion in Western music is measured by millennia. It is a story marked by intercontinental influence and trade, cosmopolitan desire, and hundreds of years of war. Political intrigue, exalted heroism, territorial ambition, and chivalrous knights were integral to the tambourine’s inclusion in concerted music. With such an adventurous and romantic history it’s no wonder that percussionists get all the girls.

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