Musica ficta

Musica ficta is the product of the medieval and renaissance practice of altering notes a semi-tone above or below the notation in the manuscript. Musica ficta, or “false music,” refers to the altered notes that do not exist on paper. Since medieval and renaissance musicians made these alterations according to an unwritten standard, modern understanding of the practice varies widely. This bibliography covers research ranging from the history and artifacts that verify the practice of musica ficta to modern-day theories of its application in contemporary performances.

The sources in this bibliography originate from many research methodologies. The majority draw on the historical research practices of score study, performance practice, text criticism, and notation studies. There are countless references to manuscripts, treatises, and tablatures as many scholarly editions are put forth. While the methods are primarily positivistic in nature, there is a strong element of hermeneutics involved. As the primary sources are relatively limited, researchers repeatedly return to the same documents in an effort to reveal new understanding. There is also a significant contemplation of aesthetic inquiry. While some of the sources unabashedly engage 19th- and 20th-century harmonic expectations in their research, other sources seek to define the aural effect of musica ficta in new ways.

There are many effective reference tools for researching musica ficta. Networking from previously located sources, either through its bibliography or by searching for additional articles by the same author, proved to be the most helpful strategy. I discovered that although the term musica ficta is well-accepted and used today, it is much less referenced as little as 30 years ago. Searching the paper indexes was a massive exercise that yielded little that I had not already
discovered through online indexes. I also found JSTOR to be extremely helpful with its full-text searching ability. I found many substantial sources that had no direct mention of *musica ficta* in the title, but significant amounts of research within the article.

One great highlight study for me was the collection of Edward Lowinsky’s writings, *Music in the Culture of the Renaissance and Other Essays.* Having located it early in my searching, it led me to a core group of musicologists that were aggressively researching *musica ficta* at the time. The most productive study was the bibliography for *musica ficta* in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart.* It pointed me to search terms and sources that I would not have discovered on my own. *The Cypriot-French Repertory of the Manuscript Torino J.II.9* also proved quite helpful.

There is a real need for research regarding *musica ficta* that compiles sources and synthesizes theories together. I struggled to find reference sources specific to *musica ficta* alone. I ended up citing more general sources about the Renaissance, in which a chapter or passage addresses the topic. Since research about *musica ficta* is often not labeled with that particular phrase, I ended up looking through a great deal of research aimed more specifically toward performance practices. I know there is additional research regarding *musica ficta* that is difficult to discover without advanced language skills or limitless time.
Reference Sources


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