
**Reviewed by Peter Seimon**

More than any other figure in music history, Franchino Gaffurio (1451–1522) may exemplify all three types of musician delineated by Boethius. He was a performer, beginning as a singer, and later becoming *maestro di capella* of the ducal chapel of the Sforzas in Milan. He was a composer, creating a number of sacred works for the court, including some in the intriguing *motetti missale* repertoire peculiar to Milan. Finally, and most significantly, Gaffurio was a true *musicus*, a writer about and judge of music. As such, he took a leading role in the lively and sometimes acrimonious debate on various theoretical questions that raged for decades in Italy, and he was a highly respected teacher, holding one of the first university chairs of music, at Pavia. And Gaffurio, as *musicus*, penned some of the most important music treatises of his time.

Amongst the many theoretical writings of Gaffurio (some unfortunately lost), three are of particular value. This trilogy of works seems to have been conceived by the author as a unified summation of all necessary musical knowledge of the time. The *Theorica musicae* appeared in 1492, the *Practica musicae* first in 1496 (with at least four later editions), and *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus* in 1518, although all three were anticipated by earlier manuscript or printed versions. Gaffurio was one of the few theorists thus to make clear and explicit in his work the traditional Aristotelian split between the speculative and the practical aspects of this harmonic science.

Until now, only the latter two works of Gaffurio’s trilogy have been readily available to scholars in modern translations (the *Practica* has two recent ones, making for some interesting possibilities for
Finally the earliest, the *Theorica*, is now also at hand with this new publication in the Music Theory Translation Series, edited by Claude V. Palisca. Walter Kurt Kreyszig has undertaken the daunting task of rendering Gaffurio’s complex text into readable English and has succeeded admirably. In contrast to another prominent series, Greek and Latin Music Theory, edited by Thomas J. Mathiesen and Jon Solomon, the translations are presented without the parallel Latin in a critical edition. Any inconvenience to the researcher will soon be remedied, however, with the upcoming publication of Dr. Kreyszig’s critical edition of the original text of the *Theorica musice*. In addition, the translator has in preparation a detailed study of the work. The three volumes together—translation, edition, and study of *Theorica musice*—will form an important resource for the scholar of the history of music theory.

As the first part of the trilogy of treatises, and the earliest of the three to be written, *Theorica musice* is expectedly somewhat less original and revealing. It compiles all of the topics of the traditional speculative music treatise in a clear and precise fashion, but it tells little of contemporaneous thought. Nevertheless, it is valuable as a complete rendering of these topics from one of the great musical minds of the Renaissance. In particular, the *Theorica* provides a thorough explication of the ideas of Boethius. Claude Palisca has said that, until the time of Gaffurio, “much of Boethius was an embarrassment to music theorists, because they could not understand large parts of it, and many parts they could understand disagreed with what they believed.”

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of this treatise for the elucidation of historical concepts for later theorists and for emerging Humanist approaches to music is witnessed by many testimonials.

Dr. Kreyszig offers a brief Introduction to Gaffurio's *Theorica musice*, mainly summarizing the contents of the treatise and presenting some background information about its writing and his translation. Undoubtedly this background will be amplified in the ensuing supplementary study. Meanwhile, this Introduction serves as a lucid entry into the work.

The treatise is carefully organized into five books of eight chapters each, the form of the work thus reflecting the highly mathematical nature of much of the content. (The *Practica musice* shows a similar symmetry in its four books of fifteen chapters each.) A short and typically flowery dedication to the Sforza duke, Lodovico, and an introductory poem begin the treatise proper.

Book One launches immediately into a complex and detailed consideration of the origins and uses of music, the usual starting point for a speculative music treatise. Gaffurio's erudition becomes evident in his wide-ranging survey of the history of music. A fascinating variety of figures from classical and biblical times appears in the author's text as he discusses the development of various instruments and the range of effects of music. Three chapters investigate the Boethian categories of *musica mundana*, *humana*, and *instrumentalis*, and another is devoted to the classification of musicians by Boethius. The final chapter of Book One broaches one of the main considerations of the whole treatise through a detailed telling of the story of Pythagoras discovering the ratios of the consonances at the blacksmith's forge. Harmony as reflected in both mathematical and musical proportions becomes the unifying theme of the entire work.

The second book turns more specifically to questions of the perception of sound and of definitions of music. While the author moves towards some technical considerations of interval, consonance, and proportion, there is still much of fascination here in the realm of psychology, philosophy and even physiology of music, much of it based on Aristotle and Augustine. Gaffurio touches in this book on some
concepts of number theory and symbolism, topics of long-standing intrigue for musical thinkers.

Book Three becomes more complex and mathematical as Gaffurio probes the subjects of number and proportion. He provides exhaustive expositions of the five genera of proportions, along with copious examples, and then delves into the even more abstruse area of the three types of threefold proportionality: arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic. This latter topic was to become one of the issues in the debate of Gaffurio with his contemporary Spataro.

The subject of proportions is continued in Book Four, but now the relation with musical consonance is made specific. Each traditional consonance (diatessaron or perfect fourth, diapente or perfect fifth, diapason or octave, diapason plus diapente, and bisdiapason or double octave) is considered in some detail and related to a proportion of simple numbers. These Pythagorean definitions of the consonances also soon became a matter for debate with Gaffurio's contemporaries, in particular Spataro. Also treated at some length is the all-important question of the division of the whole tone into two unequal semitones, a question which had haunted Greek theorists, Boethius, and many of his followers.

Book Five of Theorica musice returns to historical sources in its presentation of the Greek naming of the notes, based on the arrangements of the tetrachords in the two-octave system. Gaffurio also discusses the three genera of tetrachord, although this is a topic treated more comprehensively in De harmonia. The author then offers a detailed division of the monochord, that is, a mathematical arrangement of his system of notes in proper Pythagorean proportions along a single string. The conclusion of the treatise briefly turns to more practical matters as Gaffurio provides the more recent naming systems of Latin authors (especially Guido of Arezzo), mentions the classification of species of various intervals, and uses this species concept in a somewhat confusing and misleading attempt to describe mode. A long poem by Lancinus Curtius, a close friend of Gaffurio, concludes the treatise by summarizing some of the colorful material of Book One.

An aspect of great importance for the scholar of music theory treatises is their sources. In his study of the Gaffurio Theorica musice,
Walter Kreyszig has done a superb job of tracing many of the references and citations; his researches will be most valuable to others working in the field. Many of the names, stories, and ideas derive ultimately from Greek writers. Since Gaffurio, like many of his contemporaries, knew little Greek, an intriguing puzzle is his use of immediate sources for some of the material. Kreyszig has been able to show that a large portion of the treatise (he estimates approximately seventy percent) is taken from Boethius, mostly from *De institutione musice* but also from *De arithmetica*. Other important sources were the fifteenth-century music treatises of Ugolino, Anselmi and Gallicus. However, it is more difficult to determine the contemporaneous roots of much of the classical material. It is known that Gaffurio had access to some translations into Latin and that he later commissioned other translations, but some mysteries remain. For instance, Kreyszig admits to being unable to discover the Latin mediating sources for some of the extensive selections from Aristotle’s works. The translator does provide a comprehensive and useful listing of primary sources he has consulted, as well as a detailed index, but unfortunately no bibliography of secondary sources is included.

As might be expected, the *Theorica musice* of Franchino Gaffurio is not thrilling reading. It is often difficult, obscure, and sometimes far from modern concepts of what constitutes musical thought. However, Walter Kreyszig has provided a fluent, well-annotated translation that makes this influential work as accessible as possible. Accompanied by the forthcoming supplementary volumes, this recent addition to the literature promises to be a boon to music theory scholarship.