Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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MMus (University of Victoria, 2019)
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“Wycliffite Music:
Theological and Aesthetical Critiques of Compositional Practices
within the
Wycliffite Movement”

School of Music

Wednesday, April 28, 2021
1:00pm (PDT)
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Joseph Salem, School of Music, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Maria Virginia Acuña, School of Music, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Iain Higgins, Department of English, University of Victoria

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Robert Kowalewski, Department of Physics, UVic

Dr. Stephen V. Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In his article “The vision of music in a Lollard florilegium: Cantus in the Middle English Rosarium theologie,” Bruce W. Holsinger acknowledges the need for musicological attention to be given to the fourteenth-century English Christian heresy known as Wycliffism. The Wycliffites embraced the theological criticisms of John Wyclif (c. 1328-1384), who promoted biblical text as the true source of Christian faith and rejected performative practices such as saint worship, idolatry, imagery, and ornamentation. A chronological survey and literary analysis of Wycliffite commentaries on music demonstrate a rhetorical arc that transitions from a reformist to a revolutionary to a compromising position. Wycliffite tracts like Of Feigned Contemplative Life and The Lanterne of Lizt denote categories of musical criticism that enable a comparative analysis between these writings and contemporaneous musical compositions. The categories of intelligibility, distraction and sensuality relate to musical concerns while the category of cost functions as an extramusical critique. Roger Bowers’ doctoral dissertation addresses the effects of Wycliffism on synchronous musical practices, concluding that it motivated an orthodox counterreaction, but this dissertation is hampered by a limited delineation of musical and extramusical concerns. Intelligibility, distraction, and sensuality offer a possible inflection point between Wycliffite musical theology and the changes occurring in late-medieval English musical aesthetics. ‘La contenance angloise,’ the predominant style recognized in scholarship on earlyfifteenth-century English music, exhibits compositional changes that reflect concerns akin to those expressed in Wycliffite tracts. This hypothetical link could potentially alter current perceptions on English music's evolution during the transition from the medieval era to the renaissance.