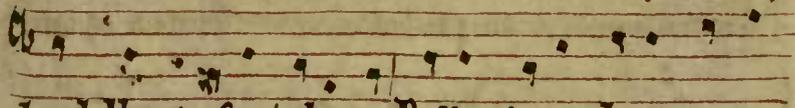


Sumer is icumen in. Thude sing cucu. Swyef sed and blowef  
Perspice xpicola. que dignacio. celicus agrico



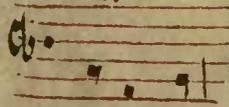
med and springe þe wode nu. Sing cucu. Awe bletef after  
la pro uital vicio filio non partens exposu



lomb. lhoup after calue cu. Bulluc stertep. bucke uertep  
it. mortis exicio. Am captiuos semiuuos



quite sing cucu. Cucu cucu. Wel singef þu cucu ne swik  
a supplicio. Vite donat et secum coronat. in ce



þu nauer nu.  
u so u o.

Hanc rotam cantare possunt quatuor socij. a paucio  
ribus autem qm a tribus ut saltem duobus no debet  
dici. pte eos qui dicat pedem. Cantu autē sic. Tacen  
tib; ceteris inchoat in his q tenet pedē. Et ai uenit  
ad pnam notam post cruce. inchoat alius. Et sic de ceteris.



Sing cucu nu. Sing cucu.

singliū repauesce ad pausaōnes sepalet  
in alibi: spacio unius longe note.  
hoc repetit unū quociens op est.  
faciens pausaōnem in fine.

Pes



Sing cucu. Sing cucu nu.

hoc dicit alij. pausans in medio et n in  
fine. Si inmediate repetes pncipiū.

# Sumer is icumen in

JAMISON H. HURST, M.A., M.D.

AUTHOR OF "READING ABBEY"

SECOND EDITION

LONDON  
NOVELLO AND COMPANY, LIMITED

1914

16788/  
8/12/21

Handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes. The text below the staff is partially obscured but appears to be a Latin phrase.

mod and spring  
la pro uicti

Handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes. The text below the staff is partially obscured but appears to be a Latin phrase.

and sing... a simple...  
vix bonis et seruis...

Handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes. The text below the staff is partially obscured but appears to be a Latin phrase.

Sing aia nu. Sing aia...

Large decorated initial 'S' in blue and red, followed by handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff with a treble clef. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes. The text below the staff is partially obscured but appears to be a Latin phrase.

Sing aia... Sing aia...

# Sumer is icumen in

BY

JAMIESON <sup>Boyd</sup> HURRY, M.A., M.D.

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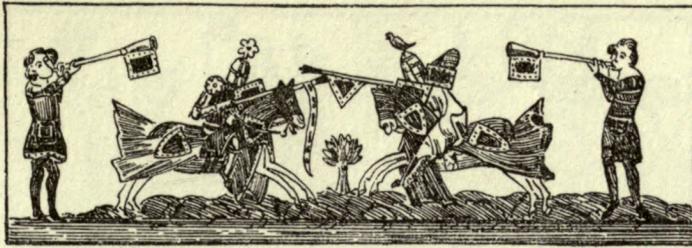


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## The Preface.

**T**HIS description of “Sumer is icumen in” was originally published at the time of the unveiling at Reading Abbey of a Memorial Tablet, bearing a facsimile of the Canon. An enlarged and revised Edition is now issued in response to a widespread demand and in the hope of drawing general attention to this masterpiece of medieval music.

J. B. H.

Westfield,  
Reading.





## i. The Prologue.

**T**HE “Noble and Royal Monastery of Reading,” which was dedicated by its Founder, King Henry Beauclerc, to the glory of God and the service of man, has left imperishable memories behind it.

Erected on a scale of great magnificence, endowed with worldly possessions and privileges such as few religious houses could rival, governed by mitred Abbots famed for their piety and learning, Reading Abbey for over four centuries filled an important place both in Church and State.

## Sumer is icumen in.

The monastic brethren were equally held in honour for their never-failing charity to the poor, the pilgrim, the leper. In the words of the ancient chronicler they were "a noble pattern of holiness and an example of unwearied and delightful hospitality."

But the most enduring Memorial of this ancient home of religion and learning, more enduring even than its imposing ivy-mantled Ruins, is that exquisite musical composition "Sumer is icumen in," which has been preserved for our perpetual instruction and delight.



## ii. "Sumer is icumen in."

**I**N the British Museum is treasured a MS. which contains a famous Canon, written by a monk at Reading Abbey, about the year 1240. This Canon, "Sumer is icumen in," has been described as "the most remarkable ancient composition in existence." The following pages seek to justify that eulogy.

### § i. The Canon.

"Sumer is icumen in" is the earliest Canon known, and one of the earliest examples of English secular music. Its harmony is far

## Sumer is icumen in.

in advance of that of any contemporary composition, and reflects glory on the English school of music in the thirteenth century.

The Canon forms a part-song for six voices. The four upper voices have a melody consisting of two independent stanzas, which is begun by the leader and taken up by the three others in turn, each entering at his appointed interval, *i.e.* four bars later, and on the same note. The music for the two lower voices constitutes a true rondel, there being two melodies which begin together and are interchanged after eight bars.

There are two sets of words : one in English, the other in Latin.

The English words have been pronounced by Dr. J. Wright to be "thirteenth century Wessex, Berkshire or Wiltshire,"<sup>1</sup> and are admirably adapted to the simple pastoral melody, with its merry graceful swing. Indeed they form one of the sweetest lyrics in early English poetry, when songs of spring and

<sup>1</sup> The Oxford History of Music, vol. i., p. 332.

## The Canon.

summer, of birds and flowers were so popular.<sup>1</sup> The note of "the merry cuckowe, messenger of spring," was frequently imitated in our national folk-songs,<sup>2</sup> and this Canon has been well termed the "cuckoo-song."

<sup>1</sup> The earliest English song with music is probably that preserved in a Bodleian MS. (Rawlinson G. 22) commencing "[M]irie it is while sumer ilaft," and dating from the first half of the thirteenth century. *Cf.* Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian, by F. Madan, vol. iii., p. 344.

Another early song with music, also preserved in the Bodleian (MS. Douce 139), begins "Foweles in the frith, the fisses in the flod," and probably belongs to the second half of the thirteenth century (*cf.* Madan, *l.c.*, vol. iv., p. 534). A photographic reproduction appears in "Early English Harmony" (Plainfong and Mediæval Music Society), Plate vii., its modern notation being given in the Oxford Dictionary of Music, vol. ii., p. 101. This song is far more elementary than the Canon. Its notation has the same character, but the ligatures are more numerous and elaborate.

<sup>2</sup> "The cuckoo, who often sings a true third and sometimes a sharp third or even a fourth, is the nearest approach to music in nature." *Cf.* Haweis, "Music and Morals," p. 6.

Sumer is icumen in.

The English song is as follows :—

*Original Words :*

Svmer is icumen in,  
Lhude sing cuccu,  
Groweþ fed and bloweþ med  
And springþ þe wde nu.  
Sing cuccu.

Awe bleteþ after lomb,  
Lhouþ after calue cu,  
Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ,<sup>1</sup>  
Murie sing cuccu.

Cuccu, cuccu.  
Wel finges þu cuccu,  
Ne fwik þu nauer nu.

*Modernised Words :*

Sumer is come in,  
Loud sing, Cuckoo !  
Groweth feed, and bloweth mead,  
And spring'th the wood now,  
Sing Cuckoo.

Ewe bleateth after lamb,  
Loweth after calf [the] cow ;  
Bullock starteth, buck verteth,  
Merry sing, Cuckoo,  
Cuckoo, Cuckoo !

Well sing'st thou, Cuckoo,  
Nor cease thou never now.

<sup>1</sup> The Wessex pronunciation of "farteth," a verb describing a noise often made by bucks (*pedere*). Cf. Murray, English Dictionary, s. "fart."

## The Canon.

The alternative Latin words, a hymn to the Saviour, form a motet, and fit the music badly. It seems as if a folk-song had been adapted for the religious service of the Abbey, or as if the Latin hymn had been added to lend an odour of sanctity to the introduction of a popular melody into the cloister. Such mal-adjustment is destructive of all pleasing effect.

The Latin hymn is as follows:—

Perfpice Chriftilola,  
Que dignacio !  
Celicus agricola  
Pro vitis vicio,  
Filio  
Non parcens, expofuit  
Mortis exicio ;  
Qui captivos femivivos  
A fupplicio  
Vite donat,  
et fecum coronat  
in celi folio.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following is a translation: "Observe, Christian, what condescension! The heavenly Husbandman, for the fault of the vine, spared not His Son, but offered Him to the fate of death. He restores the half-perished prisoners from punishment to life, and crowns them with Him on the throne of heaven."

## Sumer is icumen in.

The melody of the Canon has the compass of a ninth and is in the first mode of rhythm: that is, long and breve notes alternate with each other. The rhythm of the *pes* is in the fifth mode, the notes being all longs with the exception of the binary ligatures. In each case the long pause, the *pausa debita*, of both modes is used.

The Canon does not follow any of the old ecclesiastical modes, but is written in the modern key of F major, every diatonic interval of that scale being used. It also supplies the first example of a basso ostinato or ground-bass.

The conformity with many of the rules of modern music, in which the closes are composed of a leading-note rising to its proper resolution, is very remarkable, and indicates an advanced knowledge of musical composition in early Britain.

### § ii. The Composer.

History does not tell us who composed "the most ancient specimen of secular polyphonic music now known to exist,"<sup>1</sup> nor when or

<sup>1</sup> Grove, Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol. iii., p. 13.

## The Composer.

where the composer lived. The Wessex dialect of the words seems to suggest a familiarity with Berkshire or Wiltshire, possibly even with Reading itself;<sup>1</sup> but many years may have

<sup>1</sup> There are several dialect forms which show beyond a doubt that the composer of the song lived in the South of England. The most decisive is the syncopated 3rd person sing. *springþ*, which north of the Thames would have appeared as *springeþ* or *springes*; if this latter form were inserted the line would not scan. Other Southern forms are: *icumen*, with retention of the prefix *i* (O.E. *ge*) which was generally lost in the Midland and Northern dialects; *uertep* (O.E. *feortan*), with a voiced initial *v*-sound for the voiceless *f* of the Midlands and North; finally, the spelling *lb* for *l* in *lbude* (O.E. *hlūde*) and *lbouþ* (O.E. *hlōw(e)þ*), indicating an unvoiced *l*-sound, is only found in manuscripts written in the South of England, more especially in Kent.

It is even possible to assign the composition of the poem to the western or central parts of the South, since the form *murie* (O.E. *myrig*), with retention of the O.E. *y*-sound, written by the Norman scribe with a *u* as in French *une*, only obtains in those parts of the South (the old Wessex territory); the Kentish and more easterly dialects would have had *merie*. Cf. L. Morsbach, "Mittelenglische Grammatik," p. 19 ff.; Morris, "Specimens of Early English," Part I., p. xxxvii.

Ouseley therefore appears to have been in error when he described the Canon as "the old Northumbrian round" on the ground that "the words are obviously Northumbrian, and it is probable that the music was also composed by a north-countryman, for we know from Giraldus Cambrensis that in his days vocal harmony was practised chiefly in the parts of England north of the Humber." Cf. Naumann, "History of Music," p. 221.

## Sumer is icumen in.

separated the composer from the monk who wrote down the Canon in the cloister at Reading Abbey.

Both words and melody bear the characters of a folk-song which was possibly handed on from minstrel to minstrel. This, of course, does not mean that there was no individual composer, or that authorship was collective. On the contrary, as Combarieu well says :

“ Les chansons populaires ne sont que des œuvres devenues anonymes.”<sup>1</sup>

It is probable that there existed in England from early times a national secular song with a perfect diatonic scale, and a melody differing entirely from Church music. Moreover such music was sung in parts, as we are told by Giraldus Cambrensis, Bishop of St. David's. Writing about 1185, he says :

“ The Britons do not sing their tunes in unison, like the inhabitants of other countries, but in different parts. So that when a company of singers meets to sing, as is usual in this country, as many different parts are heard as there are singers, who all finally unite in consonance and organic melody, under the softness of B flat.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ La Musique, ses Lois, son Évolution,” p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> W. Chappell, “ Old English Music,” 1893, vol. i., p. 6. Cf. also “ The Oxford History of Music,” vol. i., p. 162.

## The Transcriber.

There were doubtless other songs in existence shewing an equally cultivated musical taste. But no contemporary polyphonic composition can for a moment compare with the Canon, whose composer must have been one of the greatest musicians the world has ever known.

### § iii. The Transcriber.

“The monk at Reading deserves an imperishable crown of glory.”<sup>1</sup> In these words does Riemann, the learned historian of music, recognise the splendid service rendered by the monk to whom we owe the Canon.

It is well known that the English Benedictines were passionately devoted to music, and appreciated its power “to charm their cares away.” They devoted much time to this amongst the other arts that flourished in the religious communities; hence the great proficiency in music, both theoretical and practical, that was attained in the song-schools which the Abbays maintained for the services of the minster. But such church music, so

<sup>1</sup> “Geschichte der Musiktheorie,” p. 151.

### Sumer is icumen in.

affiduouſly cultivated, ſtill retained barbarous combinations of ſound and groſs violations of muſical grammar, and could not compare with the contemporary ſecular muſic either as regards melody or harmony.

For many years the Church diſcouraged ſecular muſic on the ground that it was written in the “wanton key” (*il modo laſcivo*) and was therefore an obſtacle to devotion and a temptation to unholy thoughts. And ſo late as 1322 Pope John xxii. actually denounced the encroachments of counterpoint, alleging that the voluptuous harmony of thirds and fixths was only fit for profane uſe. This prohibition doubtleſs explains why ſo few ſpecimens of early ſecular muſic have ſurvived.

We know, however, that minſtrels with their folk-ſongs not infrequently gained acceſs to religious houſes in order to relieve the monotony of the monaſtic life, and it ſeems conceivable that at Reading Abbey there was a courageous monk who was ſtruck by the beauty of the Canon and who, in ſpite of eccleſiaſtical prohibition, dared to ſtudy it, to write it down, and to adapt it to the ſervices of the choir by the addition of a Latin hymn.

## The Transcriber.

This much at least is certain that in the early thirteenth century there was amongst the brethren at Reading a scholarly discantor, who wrote down in the MS. which contained the calendar of the Abbey, a beautiful melody with a well-ordered succession of tones and semi-tones, far in advance of any contemporary composition that has survived. "The wit of musike wel he knew," and that "wit" has enriched the world with this musical treasure.

Various authorities have stated that the transcriber was John of Fornfete,<sup>1</sup> keeper of the cartulary of Reading Abbey. But this statement is merely based on the fact that a prayer for John of Fornfete occurs in the margin of the Reading calendar, which the transcriber has written later in the volume. The entry is written in the calendar, against St. Wulfstan's day, 1239: "Ora, Wulfstane, pro nostro fratre, Johanne de Fornfete." This is insufficient evidence for speaking of John of Fornfete as the transcriber of the Canon.

Possibly derived from Forncett in Norfolk.

## Sumer is icumen in.

### § iv. The Performers.

Instructions to the performers<sup>1</sup> where to make the necessary pauses in singing are given in the eleven Latin lines placed in the lower right-hand corner of the MS. ; those for the upper four voices being in black, those for the *pes* in red. The original instructions are as follows :—

#### Upper Voices.

“Hanc rotam cantare possunt quatuor socii. A paucioribus autem quam tribus aut saltem duobus non debet dici, preter eos qui dicunt pedem. Canitur autem sic. Tacentibus ceteris, unus inchoat cum hiis qui tenent pedem. Et cum venerit ad primam notam post crucem, inchoat alius, et sic de ceteris. Singuli vero repaudent ad paufaciones scriptas, et non alibi, spacio unius longæ notæ.”

#### *Pes.*

“Hoc repetit unus quotiens opus est, faciens paufacionem in fine.”

“Hoc dicit alius paufans in medio et non in fine, set immediate repetens principium.”

<sup>1</sup> Johannes of Garlandia, born in England about 1190, one of the earliest writers on mensural music, alludes to “rondels and common songs” (*i.e.* secular songs) in a manner which shows that they were familiar to his readers (Riemann, “Musikalisches Lexikon”).

## The Manuscript.

The following is the English translation :—

### Upper Voices.

“ Four performers can sing this Rota. But it should not be sung by less than three or at least two persons, apart from those who sing the bass.”

“ The Rota is sung thus : While the others remain silent, one performer begins with those who sing the bass ; when he reaches the first note that follows the  $\boxtimes$ , another begins, and so do the others. Each performer stops at the indicated pause, and nowhere else, for the period of a longa.”

### *Pes.*

“ One singer repeats this as often as necessary, pausing at the end.”

“ Another singer pauses in the middle instead of at the end, and at once repeats the beginning.”

## § v. The Manuscript.

The vellum MS. (*B. M. Harl. 978*), in which the Canon or “ Rota ” occurs, has 162 leaves and measures  $7\frac{1}{2}$  by 5 inches.<sup>1</sup> The Canon is

<sup>1</sup> A fuller account of the MS. will be found in the “ Catalogue of MS. Music in the British Museum,” by A. Hughes-Hughes, vol. ii., p. 25 ; and in “ Reading Abbey,” p. 111.

The same MS. also contains a long monologue “ Samson dux fortissime ” in equally advanced rhythm and tonality as the Canon. But the song has no harmony, and therefore does not show nearly so advanced a stage of development ; moreover it requires the use of *musica ficta*, which gives it the key of

### Sumer is icumen in.

found on fol. 11b. and is in an excellent state of preservation.

There has been much discussion as to the date of the MS. Sir John Hawkins, writing in 1770, refers it to "about the middle of the fifteenth century."<sup>1</sup> Burney<sup>2</sup> believed the date to be not much later than the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and various other writers have followed either the first or second of these authorities.

There is now, however, a general consensus fixing the date at or about 1240, this view being supported on grounds of palæography, history and notation.

The hand-writing is that which prevailed during the first part of the thirteenth century, a view which has been supported by Sir Frederick Madden and by Sir E. Maunde Thompson.

G major. *Musica ficta* was the application of certain sharps and naturals necessary in singing but not shown in writing, the reason being that these accidentals did not occur on the monochord, the instrument used for teaching. In "Sumer is icumen in" *musica ficta* is not required, since the B flat was one of the notes of the monochord.

<sup>1</sup> "History of Music" (ed. 1875), vol. i., p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> "History of Music," vol. ii., p. 406.

## The Manuscript.

The historical reason for believing the song to have been written down about the year 1240<sup>1</sup> is that the MS. also contains an unfinished monastic calendar written in Reading Abbey, a more complete copy of which, by the same writer, is found in the *Cotton MS. Vespasian E.V.* In the latter copy the latest *obit* entered by the first hand is that of Abbot Adam de Latebury or de Latebar, the eleventh Abbot of Reading, who died in 1238. The date of the MS. is therefore about 1240.

The notation is that current at the time of a composer of the thirteenth century, who used the pseudonym "Aristotle," and wrote "musica quadrata seu mensurata." Thus Wolf, speaking of ternary ligatures, says:—

"The form is characteristic of the time of Aristotle . . . We meet with it in the B.M. Harl. MS., 978. This is the MS. containing the Canon, 'Sumer is icumen in,' which, according to the most recent research, must have been written about 1240, and whose notation still belongs to the time of Aristotle."<sup>2</sup>

The English words of the Canon, as well as the instructions for the upper four voices are in black ink, while the Latin words and the instructions for the fingers of the *pes* are in red ink. Initial letters are either red or blue.

<sup>1</sup> The Palæographical Society, vol. iii., ed. by Bond and Thompson, Pl. 125.

<sup>2</sup> "Geschichte der Mensural-Notation," vol. i., pp. 8, 12.

## Sumer is icumen in.

Various contemporary alterations have been made in the MS. by the same hand and in the same ink, some being alterations after erasure, and some without erasure. Except for the *pes*, the Canon seems to have been written in the first instance in breves, some of which were afterwards altered into longs.

The alterations have been carefully described by H. E. Wooldridge, who suggests the form the Canon probably had before the alterations, and to whom the reader may be referred for fuller details. The following are his conclusions :—

“The alterations of the melody—which, it will be seen, are with one exception confined to passages near the close—though naturally of considerable interest, are not of very great importance; all are in some sense improvements, but none can be said to affect the essential form of the work, which was as distinct before they were made as it is at present. It is evident, therefore, that this famous page of MS. does not present to us, as has sometimes been supposed, a record of the writer’s efforts towards the transformation either of an original subject or of some previously existing melody into a canon, since the music already apparently displayed an almost perfect specimen of this form of composition when it was first written down.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “The Oxford History of Music,” vol. i., p. 331. Cf. also “Early English Harmony,” 1897, edited by H. E. Wooldridge, p. ix.

## The Harmony.

Most of the MSS. preserved in the library at Reading Abbey perished at the dissolution of the monasteries. A few, however, have survived, and in the British Museum, the Bodleian and elsewhere, are treasured some fine illuminated MSS.,<sup>1</sup> embellished with fanciful paintings and miniatures in gold, blue, green, red and other colours. At these artistic productions various skilled craftsmen, calligraphers, rubricators, illuminators, miniaturists and binders worked jointly, each contributing the special work in which he excelled. Although from a decorative point of view the MS. containing "Sumer is icumen in" takes a humble place, in historical importance it is *facile princeps*.

### § vi. The Harmony.

"This Harleian MS. is of the greatest interest in the history of harmony."<sup>2</sup> Thus does Couffemaker refer to the importance of the Canon for students of the evolution of music.

For many centuries octaves, fifths and fourths were persistently used to the exclusion of thirds and sixths which appear to us such

<sup>1</sup> A descriptive list will be found in "Reading Abbey," pp. 103 ff.

<sup>2</sup> "L'Art Harmonique," p. 150.

## Sumer is icumen in.

natural consonances. Even the early contrapuntists felt obliged to restrict themselves to the time-honoured intervals, and it was not until the middle of the fourteenth century that the old progressions of fourths and fifths were abandoned, and that thirds and sixths were generally admitted amongst musical concords.

There are, however, references by various writers to the earlier use of these intervals by the best discantors, especially in England and in the district known as the "West Country," and "Sumer is icumen in" possesses great interest as one of the earliest compositions to exhibit the free use of thirds and sixths.<sup>1</sup> Combarieu indeed says:—

"Its admirable harmony is in fact precisely due to thirds and sixths, although there are some consecutive fifths."<sup>2</sup>

It would probably have been difficult to construct so complicated a composition without the use of thirds, and, as Couffemaker suggests, it may be that the compositions of this kind led by degrees to the admission of thirds and sixths as consonances.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An account of the introduction of thirds and sixths will be found in the "Oxford History of Music," vol. i., pp. 156 ff.

<sup>2</sup> "La Musique, ses Lois, son Évolution," p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> "L'Art Harmonique," p. 73.

## The Harmony.

Another remarkable feature is the use of the major seventh as a leading note, and the various harmonic progressions have as intimate a connection with the key-note as in modern music. In the words of Hope :—

“The earliest use of the major seventh or sharpened leading note partially, if not wholly, is found in the English Rota ‘Sumer is i-cumen in.’”<sup>1</sup>

The following analysis of the part-writing of the Canon has been given by W. S. Rockstro :—

“Side by side with passages of rudest Discant, it exhibits progressions which might well have passed uncensured in the far later days of Palestrina. The 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 24th bars are in strict Two-Part Counterpoint of the First and Second Order, of irreproachable purity. But, in passing from the 9th to the 10th, and from the 13th to the 14th bars, a flagrant violation of the first cardinal rule results in the formation of Consecutive Fifths between the first and third Cantus parts in the one case, and between the second and fourth Cantus in the other. The same rule is broken, between Cantus II. and Bassus I., in passing from bar 17 to bar 18; and, in bars 37, 38, 39, a similar infraction of the rule produces no less than three Consecutive Fifths between Cantus I. and Bassus II. Between bars 29 and 30, Cantus I. and II. sing Consecutive Unisons; and the error is repeated, between bars 33, 34, by Cantus II. and Cantus III., simultaneously with Consecutive Fifths between both these Parts and Cantus I. Similar faults are repeated, as the Rota proceeds, with persistent regularity.

<sup>1</sup> “Medieval Music,” p. 122.

## Sumer is icumen in.

“Now, the smooth progressions shown in the 4th, 8th, and 24th bars are as stringently forbidden in the Diaphonia of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the Consecutive Fifths in bars 37, 38, and 39 are in the Counterpoint of the fifteenth and sixteenth, or even in that of the fourteenth century. To which of these epochs, then, are we to refer the Rota? The peculiarity of the Part-Writing clearly affords us no means whatever of answering the question, but is calculated rather to mislead than to throw new light upon the point at issue.”<sup>1</sup>

### § vii. The Notation.

The musical notes are the *longa*, a square with a stem, and the *brevis*, a diamond-shaped note without a stem. In one place—*i.e.* the last note but one in the fourth line (above the word “ne”)—the scribe has apparently forgotten to give a *longa* its stem. Each *longa* is perfect when followed by another *longa*, and imperfect when followed by a *brevis*.

There are also illustrations of the ligatures used in medieval music. Thus in the first line we have three conjunct lozenge-shaped notes descending obliquely towards the right, the first one having a descending tail,

<sup>1</sup> Grove, “Dictionary of Music and Musicians,” vol. iv., p. 753.

## The Notation.

thus .<sup>1</sup> Again in the *pes* two notes are bonded, *i.e.* written one above the other and joined by a line, the lowest one being sung first.

The notes are black and are written on a staff of six red lines.<sup>2</sup> There are neither marks for time, red notes, nor the white open notes which were in use in the following century.

In certain places the staff is marked by short upright lines, which indicate the ends of the musical phrases, and show that a fresh breath is to be taken. They have nothing in common with the bar line, which did not enter into music notation until some centuries later.

The Canon is in the modern key of F major, having B flat marked on each staff, just as in a modern composition in one flat, the letter C

<sup>1</sup> There has been some discussion as to the correct interpretation of these notes. Cf. Chappell, "Old English Popular Music, 1893," vol. i., p. 13; Wolf, "Geschichte der Mensural-Notation," vol. i., p. 8; Couffemake, "Histoire de l'Harmonie au Moyen Age," p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> If the highest line of the score be ignored, the music will correspond with the modern tenor clef, and can easily be read.

## Sumer is icumen in.

being also written as a clef. Only one staff is used, and a ✕ indicates the point at which each successive voice enters.

It is interesting to observe that the notation employed in the Canon corresponds with that of Franco. That author, moreover, always used the exact number of lines and spaces in his staff that are needed to include the entire range of his vocal parts.<sup>1</sup> The same principle is adopted in the Canon.

### § viii. The Modern Score.

The Canon is reproduced in modern notation to facilitate its general use.<sup>2</sup>

The C clef of the original is replaced by the G clef for the upper four voices, and the F clef for the *pes*.

The square black-tailed notes, where perfect by position (*i.e.* equivalent to three shorter

<sup>1</sup> Grove, "Dictionary of Music and Musicians," vol. ii., p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Messrs. Novello and Co., Ltd., publish several versions adapted for three, four or six voices (1½d. each). There are also versions for children.

## The Modern Score.

notes), are replaced by dotted femibreves; where imperfect by position by femibreves without dots. The untailed lozenge-shaped notes are replaced by minims.

In bar four the three conjunct lozenge-shaped notes having an oblique tail or *tractus* are replaced by three minims. In bar four and the last bar of the *pes* the two notes in ligature are replaced by minims.

For the time-signature the modern measure  $\frac{3}{2}$  is the most convenient.

The accompanying score is that edited by W. S. Rockstro. The Canon may be sung either by four trebles and two tenors (or basses), or by four tenors and two basses, in either case without instrumental accompaniment. It will be observed that some liberties have been taken both with the words and the music. A modern score with the original words will be found in Grove's Dictionary of Music, vol. iv., p. 750.

# Sumer is icumen in.

1st TREBLE  
(or TENOR).

Sum - mer is a - com - ing in, . . . Loud now sing cuc -

2nd TREBLE  
(or TENOR).

Sum - mer is a -

3rd TREBLE  
(or TENOR).

4th TREBLE  
(or TENOR).

1st BASS  
(called PES in  
the original  
MS.)

Sing cuc - - koo, now . . sing cuc - -

2nd BASS.

Sing cuc - - koo, sing cuc - -

ACCOMP.

*2 voice entpt.*

- koo, Grow - eth seed, and blow - eth mead, and

- com - ing in, . . . Loud we sing cuc - koo,

Sum - mer is a - com - ing in, . . .

- koo, sing cuc - - koo, now . .

- koo, now . . sing cuc - - koo,

# Sumer is icumen in.

spring the woods a - new. Sing cuc - koo, Ewe now  
 grow - eth seed, and blow - eth mead, and spring the woods a - new, Sing  
 Loud now sing cuc - koo, Grow - eth seed, and blow - eth mead, and spring the  
 Sum - mer is a - com - ing in, . . . Loud now sing cuc - koo, Grow - eth  
 Sing cuc - koo, sing cuc - koo, now . . . sing  
 Sing cuc - koo, now . . . sing cuc - koo, sing

bleat - eth af - ter lamb, loweth af - ter calf the cow, Bul - lock start - eth,  
 cuc - koo, Ewe now bleat - eth af - ter lamb, loweth af - ter calf the  
 woods a - new, Sing cuc - koo, Ewe now bleat - eth  
 seed, and blow - eth mead, and spring the woods a - new, Sing cuc -  
 cuc - koo, sing cuc - koo, now . . . sing cuc -  
 cuc - koo, now . . . sing cuc - koo, sing cuc -

## Sumer is icumen in.

buck now vert - eth, mer - ry sing cuc - koo, cuc - koo,  
 cow. Bul - lock start - eth, buck now vert - eth, mer - ry sing cuc -  
 af - ter lamb, loweth af - ter calf the cow. Bul - lock start - eth,  
 - koo, Ewe now bleat - eth af - ter lamb, and af - ter calf the  
 - koo, sing cuc - koo, now . . sing cuc -  
 - koo, now . . sing cuc - koo, sing cuc -

1st time.

cuc - koo, . . well sing'st thou cuc - koo, nor . . cease thou nev - er  
 - koo, cuc - koo, cuc - koo, . . well sing'st thou cuc -  
 buck now vert - eth, mer - ry sing cuc - koo, cuc - koo,  
 cow, bul - lock start - eth, buck now vert - eth, mer - ry sing cuc -  
 - koo, sing cuc - koo, now . . sing cuc -  
 - koo, now . . sing cuc - koo, sing cuc -

1st time.

# Sumer is icumen in.

now, Sum-mer is a-com-ing in, . . Loud now sing cuc - koo,  
 - koo, nor . . cease thou nev - er now. Sum-mer is a-com-ing  
 cuc - koo, . . well sing'st thou cuc-koo, nor . . cease thou nev - er now.  
 - koo, cuc - koo, cuc - - koo, . . well sing'st thou cuc-koo,  
 - koo, sing cuc - koo, now . . sing cuc - koo,  
 - koo, now . . sing cuc - koo, sing cuc - koo,

*Last time.*  
 Grow-eth seed, and blow-eth mead, and cease thou nev - er now.  
 in, . . Loud now sing cuc - koo, well sing'st thou cuc - koo.  
 Sum-mer is a-com-ing in, . . loud now sing cuc - koo.  
 nor . . cease thou nev - er now, mer - ry sing cuc - koo.  
 sing cuc - koo, now . . sing cuc - - koo.  
 now . . sing cuc - koo, sing cuc - - koo.  
*Last time.*

## Sumer is i cumen in.

### § ix. "An Amazing Production."

"An amazing production" is H. E. Wooldridge's description of this Canon, which has been "so often mentioned by historians and with ever-increasing surprise and admiration."<sup>1</sup> It may be of interest to append some further appreciations arranged mainly in chronological sequence. The bibliographical references will be useful to readers who desire to study the Canon in greater detail.

### *English and American.*

Charles Burney :—

"This precept (*i.e.* the prohibition of fifths and eighths in succession) seems to have been so much unknown or disregarded by the composer of the Canon, 'Sumer is i cumen in,' that the violation of a rule so earnestly recommended by theorists and religiously observed by practitioners ever since the laws of harmony were established, excites a suspicion that this Canon is much more ancient than has been imagined."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Oxford History of Music," vol. i., pp. 326-7.

<sup>2</sup> "History of Music (1782)," vol. ii., p. 425.

## An Amazing Production.

J. Stafford Smith :—

“ ‘ Sumer is icomen ’ is written in the favourite measure of the ancient Monks, viz. Hemiola. This very ancient English poetry, united with a Pastoral Air, is an infantine attempt at composition.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Busby :—

“ This specimen of harmonical structure (the first example of counterpoint in six parts) with all its defects is very superior to anything extant of the same period.”<sup>2</sup>

W. Chappell :—

“ The earliest secular composition, in parts, known to exist in any country.”<sup>3</sup>

Alexander J. Ellis :—

“ This Cuckoo Song, which is so great a musical curiosity, is also a valuable contribution to our knowledge of early English pronunciation.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ *Musica Antica* (1812),” p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> “ *History of Music* (1819),” vol. i., p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> “ *Popular Music of the Olden Time* ” (1st ed.), vol. i., p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> “ *Early English Pronunciation* ” (Chaucer Society), 1869, Part ii., p. 422 ff., where many philological details are given.

## Sumer is icumen in.

H. E. Wooldridge :—

“ The earliest example of English secular music.”<sup>1</sup>

“ Contains the earliest canon, and the earliest persistently repeated bass, as yet discovered.”<sup>2</sup>

F. L. Ritter :—

“ One of the oldest documents of secular music in contrapuntal form, and a proof that at this early epoch harmonic art must have made great progress in England.”<sup>3</sup>

Henry Davey :—

“ So far as we know, not a piece endurable by modern ears existed before 1400, or ever did exist, save and except only ‘ Sumer is icumen in.’ ”

“ English musicians invented the art of musical composition.”<sup>4</sup>

Sir Hubert H. Parry :—

“ The famous English tune, ‘ Sumer is icumen in,’ which is attributed to the thirteenth century, is remarkable not only on account of its rhythmical character,

<sup>1</sup> “Oxford History of Music,” vol. ii., p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Chappell, “Old English Popular Music” (ed. 1893), vol. i., p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> “Music in England and Music in America,” p. 22.

“History of Music,” pp. 50, 52.

## An Amazing Production.

but also on account of its obvious attempt at supplying a harmonious accompaniment."<sup>1</sup>

W. H. Cummings :—

“ If we regard this music from the points of perfect tonality, accent, rhythm and harmony, we shall in vain search the archives (of the thirteenth or succeeding century) of any country for its parallel, or for music approaching it in excellence and completeness.”<sup>2</sup>

E. Walker :—

“ It combines beauty of sound and ingenuity of workmanship in a way that has no parallel in early music.”

“ Artificially we may say that nothing written for more than two hundred years afterwards can touch it.”<sup>3</sup>

J. E. Matthew :—

“ The style of the composition, both in melody and harmony, is far in advance of anything known at that time.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ Oxford History of Music,” vol. iii., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Northumbrian Small Pipes Society, Report of Annual Meeting, 1897, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> “ History of Music in England,” p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> “ Manual of Musical History,” p. 88.

## Sumer is icumen in.

F. J. Crowest :—

“ ‘ Sumer is icumen in ’ is probably the greatest musical curiosity extant. It is the oldest piece of polyphonic and canonical composition known to be in existence, and is reputed to be also the oldest song with musical notes attached to it.”<sup>1</sup>

R. C. Hope :—

“ In the British Museum there is a round, the well-known ‘ Sumer is icumen in,’ probably the most ancient example of its kind in existence.”

“ Thirds, sixths, and passing notes are made use of.”

“ It is a folk-song pure and simple, and the first English song, with or without music forthcoming.”<sup>2</sup>

F. A. G. Ouseley :—

“ Unquestionably the oldest piece of polyphonic and canonical composition known to be in existence.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ The Story of British Music,” p. 275, *et passim*.

<sup>2</sup> “ Medieval Music,” pp. 104, 122.

<sup>3</sup> Naumann, “ History of Music,” p. 220.

## An Amazing Production.

C. F. Abdy Williams :—

“The famous Canon, ‘Sumer is icumen in,’ cannot be a single effort; it must have been preceded by hundreds of similar compositions, or it could not have reached so high a standard of development.”<sup>1</sup>

W. Barclay Squire :—

“The existence of an English School of Music extraordinarily advanced for its time is proved by the celebrated ‘rota’ or round, ‘Sumer is y-cumen in.’”<sup>2</sup>

“The earliest extant example of a round is the well-known ‘Sumer is icumen in.’”<sup>3</sup>

D. Francis Tovey :—

“No work within two centuries of the date of ‘Sumer is icumen in’ attains a style so nearly intelligible to modern ears. Its richness and firmness of harmony are such that the frequent use of consecutive fifths and octaves, in strict accordance with thirteenth century principles, has to our ears all the effect of a series of

<sup>1</sup> “The Story of Notation,” p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> “Dictionary of National Biography,” s. Dunstable.

<sup>3</sup> “Grove, Dictionary of Music and Musicians,” vol. iv., p. 165.

## Sumer is icumen in.

grammatical blunders, so sharply does it contrast with the smooth counterpoint of the rest.”<sup>1</sup>

W. S. Pratt :—

“ A famous instance of a true four-part canon which rests on a brief two-part canonic burden that is repeated over and over, while the chief canon proceeds.”

“ The burden sings monotonously back and forth between tonic and dominant harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

M. H. Glyn :—

“ But for ‘Summer is i-cumen in’ we should not have known that in the thirteenth century any monk would have dared to study the folk-music and bring it within the four walls of a monastery.”<sup>3</sup>

W. A. J. Ford :—

“ An age that produced ‘Sumer is a cumin in’ (1240) must have been prolific of melody. It is impossible to regard it as an isolated phenomenon.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Encyclopædia Britannica,” vol. xix., p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> “History of Music,” pp. 80-1.

<sup>3</sup> “Analysis of the Evolution of the Musical Form,” p. 121.

“Encyclopædia Britannica,” vol. xxv., p. 404.

## An Amazing Production.

### *Continental.*

J. N. Forkel :—

“An ancient and remarkable work of art.”<sup>1</sup>

E. de Couffemaker :—

“This Harleian MS. is of the greatest interest in the history of harmony.”<sup>2</sup>

E. Naumann :—

“‘Sumer is icumen in’ is in the key of F major, and not in any of the Church modes, and is in strict conformity with the rules of modern music in its closes, which are uniformly composed of a leading-note rising to its proper resolution.”<sup>3</sup>

F.-J. Fétis :—

“No wonder the composer of the Canon was unable to avoid the consecutive fifths and octaves which all earlier discantors had constantly used. In fact we may safely consider him as the greatest musician of the period, in spite of the imperfections of his composition.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Geschichte der Musik,” vol. ii., p. 490.

<sup>2</sup> “L’Art Harmonique,” p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> “History of Music,” ed. by Ouseley,” vol. i., p. 555.

<sup>4</sup> “Histoire de la Musique,” vol. v., p. 320.

## Sumer is Icumen in.

Guido Adler :—

“The English Canon seems to have fallen from heaven like a meteor.”

“The composition is obviously not a simple inspiration, but a carefully thought out work of art.”<sup>1</sup>

A. W. Ambros :—

“The whole composition proves a well-considered study of the combination of tones, and is a notable memorial of English art in the earliest times.”<sup>2</sup>

S. Vantyn :—

“The Rota of Reading is the oldest MS. of any polyphonic music.”

“We may safely conclude that there was an English school of music at Reading in the thirteenth century.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “*Vierteljahrsschrift f. Musikwissenschaft*,” 1886, pp. 302, 308.

<sup>2</sup> “*Geschichte der Musik*,” vol. ii., p. 515.

<sup>3</sup> “*L'Évolution de la Musique en Angleterre*,” pp. 16, 18.

## An Amazing Production.

Jules Combarieu :—

“The charming madrigal ‘Sumer is icumen in’ is a very beautiful and famous English polyphonic composition; it owes its admirable harmony, in spite of some consecutive fifths, mainly to the use of thirds and sixths.”<sup>1</sup>

W. Nagel :—

“The Canon is in the highest degree remarkable for its tonality.”<sup>2</sup>

Otto Klauwell :—

“The composition is a quite astonishing piece of harmony, considering its date.”<sup>3</sup>

Victor Lederer :—

“The high standard of musical art, which this Canon displays, proves clearly that it did not originate alone. There must have been preceding musical development, although at present we are ignorant of it.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “La Musique, ses Lois, son Evolution,” p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> “Geschichte der Musik in England,” vol. i., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> “Der Canon in seiner Geschichtlichen Entwicklung,” p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> “Ueber Heimat und Ursprung der Mehrstimmigen Tonkunst,” p. 12.





### iii. The Epilogue.

**I**N June 18th, 1913, the 792nd anniversary of the founding of Reading Abbey by Henry Beauclerc, a Memorial Tablet in honour of the Canon was unveiled by Dr. H. P. Allen, of New College, Oxford, Choragus in the University. The Tablet is placed in the famous Chapter House that has been the scene of so many great national functions, and not far from the Memorials erected in honour of Hugh de Boves and Hugh Cook Faringdon, the first and last Abbots of Reading.

The central slab is of yellow magnesian limestone, measuring 4 feet by 3 feet, and presents the "Song" in facsimile. The black notes and words are cut into the stone and

**Sumer is icumen in.**

filled in with black mastic cement, the red and blue initials, the red staff, and the red Latin words being reproduced in mastic of appropriate colour.

This slab forms a panel let into the larger slab of blue Forest of Dean stone, measuring 7 feet by 4 feet, and adorned with the arms of Reading Abbey (azure three escallops or). It bears the following Inscription :—

**“Sumer is icumen in.”**

THIS CANON, WHICH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS “THE MOST REMARKABLE ANCIENT MUSICAL COMPOSITION IN EXISTENCE,” WAS WRITTEN DOWN AT READING ABBEY, *CIRCA* A.D. 1240.

The Tablet was designed by Mr. W. Ravenscroft, F.S.A., the work being executed by Mr. W. S. Frith, sculptor.

## The Epilogue.

Reading Abbey during the Middle Ages played an important *rôle* on the stage of our religious and political history. Few of our monastic foundations were so often chosen for the holding of Parliaments, for royal marriages and funerals, or for great secular and ecclesiastical councils.

As a home of Christian worship and active benevolence the Abbey was also greatly distinguished. "Ever at the sacred gates sat Mercy pouring out relief from a never-failing store to the poor and the suffering; ever within the sacred aisles the voices of holy men were pealing heavenwards for the sins of mankind."

The hour of its dissolution struck in 1539, when so many great monastic foundations came to a dramatic close. The mitred Abbot of Reading passed along a *via dolorosa* to die a traitor's death on the gibbet and the quartering-block. The brethren were expelled from their well-loved cloisters into a cold, unsympathetic world. The Abbey was plundered by sacrilegious hands and dug out as a common quarry.

To-day little remains but crumbling ruins. The fire is extinguished on the altar, the

## Sumer is icumen in.

voice of prayer and thanksgiving is silent, the music is hushed in the choir. Abbot, prior, cantor, sacrist, monk have made their *exit* for ever.

But the part played by the Abbey in the history of music will be held in perpetual remembrance. This glory must abide even when "Time's effacing finger" has removed the last vestige of that *chef d'œuvre* of architecture which Henry Beauclerc dedicated to the honour of God and the service of man, and in which he found his final resting-place.



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