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PRAETORIUS ON PERFORMANCE:

EXCERPTS FROM SYNTAGMA MUSICUM III

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en Michael Praetorius published the Syntagma Musicum [SM] in the early seventeenth century, he capitalized upon his remarkable zeal for history, his seemingly unbounded enthusiasm for modern, i.e. Italian, music, and his indefatigable capacity for order and system. Three of the planned four volumes appeared in reasonably quick succession:

I. Syntagmatis musici tomus primus (Wittenberg and Wolfenbiittel, 1614-15),
a discussion of "sacred and secular music; the former dealing with the chant
and psalmody of the ancients, theMissodia, [and] instrumental music, as used
in both the Old and New Testaments...."
II. Syntagmatis musici tomus secundus. De Organographia (Wolfenbuttel, 1618), an organological treatise "containing the nomenclature, tuning, and characteristics of all ancient and modern, foreign, barbarian, rustic and unfamiliar, as well as native, artful, agreeable, and familiar musical instru-ments; together with true and accurate drawings."
III. Syntagmatis musici tomus tertius (Wolfenbuttel, 1618), a discussion of matters of performance, including "the definition, classification, and descrip-
tion of nearly all the musical forms current in Italian, French, English, and
German"; "information concerning the notes"; "the use of thorough-bass; the
convenient arrangement of a concerto with instruments and voices grouped in
separate choirs; [and] instruction of young school-boys in the modern Italian
style of singing."'

Thus Praetorius offers a "triptych" of musical learning. The historical first part addresses the learned in scholarly Latin (though he acknowledges the value of a German translation); the organological second part adopts the vernacular for "organ builders, organists, and all other instrumentalists"; the practical third part retains the vernacular for both "musicos and
musices cultores. "2

Praetorius, as an observant man of the early seventeenth century, is caught in a world of dramatic change, a world to which SM forms an impressive—though sometimes indirect—response. For example, few contemporary changes were as challenging, one suspects, as the cosmological reorientation of the universe by Copernicus and Galileo. This "Copernican Revolution" in which a heliocentric view of the heavens overthrew humankind's place in the center of creation unsettlingly disrupted the previous system of order. And as