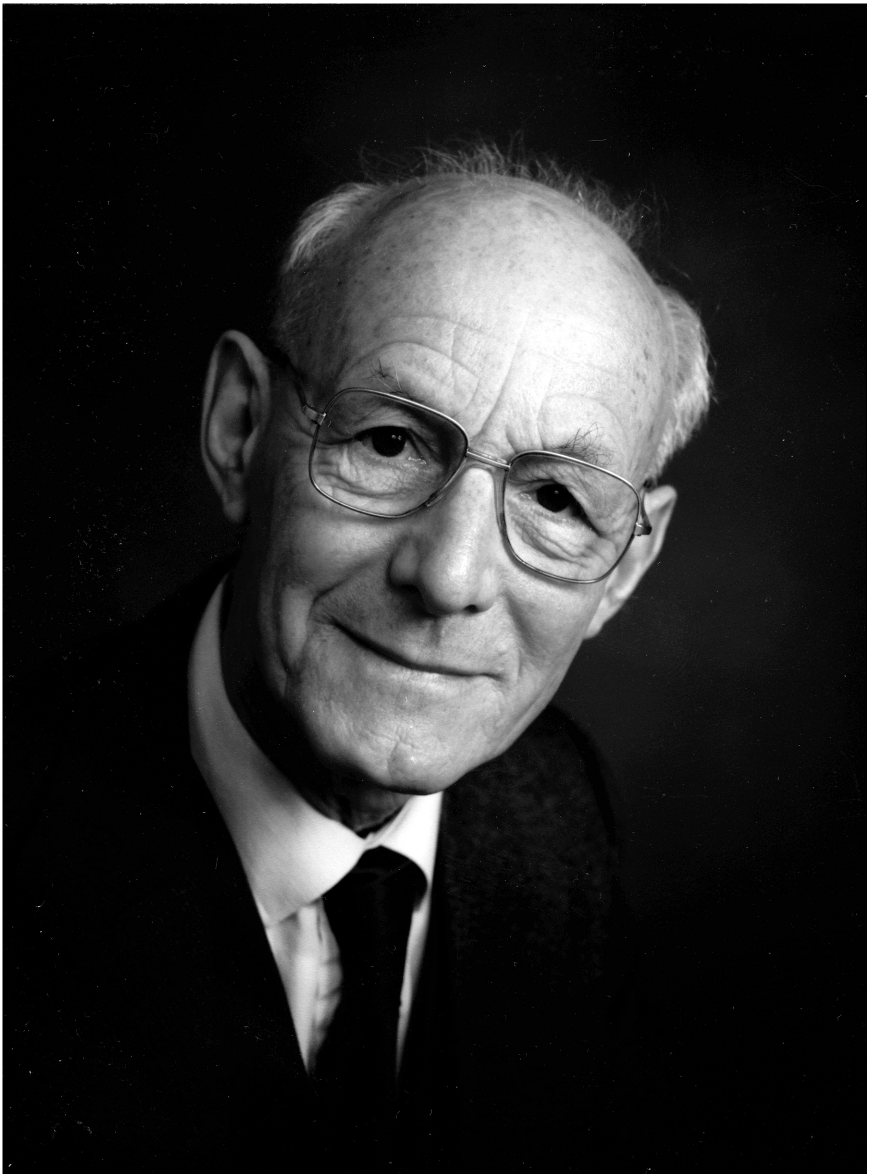

JOHN STEVENS *Eaden Lilley, Cambridge*

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John Edgar Stevens
1921–2002

IN THE SUMMER OF 2002, John Stevens's personal copy of *Music at the Court of Henry VIII* came into my possession. Originally published in 1962 as volume XVIII of the monumental series *Musica Britannica*, initiated in the wake of the Festival of Britain, it remains the standard edition of some beguiling songs and instrumental pieces of early-Tudor England, many of them now fairly well known and often performed by both professional and amateur ensembles. To turn the pages of the editor's own copy is to discover a light dusting of annotations and corrections in pencil, written in his discreet and elegant hand, and in one place he has thoroughly revised one of the editions by taping staves of neatly handwritten music over the printed original, changing his solution to the tenor part in the intricate puzzle canon by Robert Fayrfax. In this and some other respects, this copy is a unique scholarly resource in its own right, just as it is a poignant reminder of scholarly tools and methods long relinquished by all save the most determined. Yet perhaps the most revealing part of John Stevens's personal copy of this edition lies elsewhere. At the back are two documents, left loose between the flyleaf and the cover. One is a letter from Thurston ('Bob') Dart, and the other a brief postcard from a young graduate student, named David Fallows, who respectfully questions (one might say politely challenges) Stevens on a particular point in one of his editions after a long day with the manuscripts in the British Museum.[1]

[1] The best conspectus of John Stevens's career, albeit with a necessary emphasis upon his musical research, is the article by Iain Fenlon in *New Grove* II, *sv* 'Stevens, John (Edgar)'. This also includes a substantial bibliography of Stevens's publications, omitting no major item. I am most

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These two communications reveal much about John Stevens's benign and constructive presence among British musical and literary scholars for several generations, beginning in the late 1940s, when he was made a Bye-Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and extending virtually to the day of his demise on 14 February 2002. (A keen Chaucerian, he would have appreciated the melancholy irony of the date.) Of the two correspondents represented in the letters, Thurston Dart was the supervisor of Stevens's Ph.D. and a leading figure in British musicology for many years. While at Cambridge, Dart lived 'an immensely energetic triple life of teaching, writing and editing and concert giving'.[2] The author of the postcard, David Fallows, is now Professor David Fallows, FBA, a musicologist of distinction and a scholar who has often acknowledged the influence of Stevens's work upon his own.[3] As those two brief communications suggest, Stevens was always in touch with a wide range of scholars from those at the height of their careers to those just making a beginning.

John Stevens was born in East Dulwich, South London, on 8 October 1921, to talented parents who gave him a start in life that Boethius would have admired, for his father was a keen violinist and his mother a graduate in mathematics. They thus married together the two arts that the ill-fated senator, in the tradition of the Greeks, regarded as indissolubly wed. Stevens won a scholarship to Christ's Hospital where he acquired the statutory gratis copy of Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* that he treasured (and used) all his life. He then went on to become a scholar at Magdalene College, Cambridge, first reading Classics (1940–1) and then, after war service, English (1946–8). He was never to leave Magdalene during his long and productive career except for a period, which he much

grateful to the following Fellows of the British Academy who shared their reminiscences of Professor Stevens with me, who loaned materials or who read an earlier draft of this memoir: Professor Dame Gillian Beer, Professor John Beer, Dr Margaret Bent, Professor Helen Cooper and Professor David Fallows. I am solely responsible for any inaccuracies or infelicities that remain.

[2] *The New Grove* II, *sv* 'Dart, Thurston'.

[3] See especially David Fallows, 'English Song-Repertories of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 103 (1976–7), 61–79, at 78, n: 'I must express my gratitude . . . particularly to John Stevens whose work obviously lies at the root of almost everything presented here, and who improved this paper by offering some extremely pertinent questions and observations at a time when he was heavily committed with other obligations.' For another tribute from a leading musicologist, see the dedication to M. Bent, *Dunstaple* (Oxford, 1981). Dr Bent dedicated this book on the most important English composer of the fifteenth century to Stevens in memory of his friendship and influence during her Cambridge days, and indeed long after.

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enjoyed, as Visiting Professor at the University of California at Berkeley. In his Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge, *The Old Sound and the New*,[4] Stevens recalls how each student of Magdalene was called, twice a week, into the presence of the Master, A. B. Ramsay, a distinguished Latin poet and close friend of the great medievalist M. R. James; once inside the lodge, the students were required to recite a portion of verse in one of the classical languages. Stevens, who remembered these visits to Ramsay as elocution lessons under another name, recalled the question that the Master was fond of putting to the students: 'What are the three things I require of my boys?' The well-rehearsed and expected answer was 'Accuracy, Eloquence and Deportment, Master'. One might be tempted to pass quickly over this quaint story of Victorian values brought into the age of Philip Larkin and (almost) into the decade of the Chatterley ban, were it not for the fact that John Stevens derived so much more from those lessons in accuracy, eloquence and deportment than a picturesque anecdote.

The Second World War interrupted Stevens's studies at Magdalene. He served on a minesweeper, as many did who were gifted with sharp and sensitive hearing (this was also an acceptable task for a conscientious objector). When he returned to Cambridge he was eventually offered a Bye-Fellowship at his old college (1948), then a Research Fellowship (1950) and finally a full Fellowship in 1953. He married Charlotte Somner in 1946. From his house in Chesterton Road he was accustomed to row along the Cam to the English Faculty offices, using the water route to his place of business like a Tudor official taking the Thames to the Westminster steps. Stevens spent most of his Magdalene years in a magnificent fifteenth-century chamber in the first court, with a small cubby to one side that had once served, as he loved to relate, for a privy. At a small and crowded desk, he often worked at an appropriately monastic hour before dawn (Magdalene was founded for Benedictine monks to study at the university) while the rest of academic Cambridge was asleep. This was a habit he acquired in the early years of fatherhood of his two sons and two daughters, and he never relinquished it. Many generations of students and graduates passed through these rooms, reading their weekly essays and benefiting as much from hospitality as from criticism that could be firm but was never uncharitable, and which was given in a soft

[4] *The Old Sound and the New* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 12 n.

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voice with a stammer that Stevens battled to overcome.[5] Graduates and academic colleagues from other faculties in Cambridge also came to these rooms for the Medieval Graduate Seminars that always began with a large and angry kettle boiling, remarkably quickly, for tea. Stevens had read Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (a book he much admired) and knew that the best way to make a kettle sing is ostentatiously to ignore it, which he invariably did. Academic visitors from overseas contemplated this British tea ceremony with almost anthropological interest.

In those rooms, or in the small and book-lined crow's nest at the top of his later Cambridge house in Bell's Court, situated halfway up Castle Hill, Stevens wrote his books and articles in a painstaking longhand with a fountain pen. (Only later in his life did he acquire a computer, but he regarded it as a most untrustworthy friend.) His studies were often laid aside when friends came to play viols or to sing Renaissance part-songs, often from his own editions. The element of conviviality in music was essential to him. Despite the undoubted breadth of his musical interests, Stevens's many writings do not suggest he wished to engage at all extensively with the notion that music should sometimes disturb or unsettle the listener, although he emphatically believed that there was something unfathomable, and therefore potentially disconcerting, in all musical effects. In his Inaugural Lecture of 1981 he may reveal more than a gift for apt use of quotation when he invokes 'sounds that give delight and hurt not', from *The Tempest*. In the manner of a consort assembled in a Jacobean house from musically gifted friends—and some very challenging music was played in such houses—Stevens associated music especially with the 'Elian spirit of friendliness and humour' that animates the Charles Lamb Society of which he was a member and at one time the President. Yet his standards of performance were always high, indeed professional, as some of his fellow players will remember. He was fond of quoting the passage in William Byrd's last publication, *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets* (1611), which calls musicians to rehearse with care, since the excellence of a piece 'is seldom or never well performed at the first singing or playing'. Stevens associated music further with all the higher things of the spirit, in the manner of John Milton and especially of George Herbert, two poets whom he especially favoured among the many that

[5] It is no surprise to read the following in the preface to a recently published book by one of his pupils: '[I] sat around the fire in John's wonderful rooms at Magdalene College, discussing the vital questions of medieval monophony over a glass of wine' (M. O'Neill, *Courtly Love Songs of Medieval France: Transmission and Style in the Trouvère repertory* (Oxford, 2006), p. ii).

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sustained him throughout his life. He sometimes spoke with feeling of the passage in Izaak Walton's *The Life of Mr. George Herbert* that describes how the poet would gather twice a week with friends in Salisbury for 'an appointed private music meeting', playing his part on lute or viol.

Stevens was also a skilled leader of musicians. For a number of years he directed The English Singers, a chamber choir that was based in the English Faculty (wondrous to relate, in these days of the RAE). The ensemble recruited its members from graduates and undergraduates by audition, as well as from Faculty members, and there are many in Cambridge who still remember a performance of the twelfth-century *Play of Daniel* in the crisp acoustic of the chapel in Jesus College, a perfect setting since the chapel was once the conventual church of the twelfth-century nunnery of Saint Radegund. Stevens had a light tenor voice that he used to good effect as a leader of singers (for a director must be able to sing wisely, but not too well), and he often sang to great effect in his lectures. As an instrumentalist, he played the piano and the harpsichord in an accomplished manner, but his greatest love was perhaps for playing the viol in consort (he listed 'viol-playing' as his recreation in *Who's Who*). The viol is arguably the supreme resource, after the human voice, for the performance of intricate counterpoint by English masters such as Byrd or Jenkins, and Stevens valued it highly. The viol ensemble he joined included amongst its distinguished members the instrument-maker John Isaacs and the musicologist Richard Maunder, and the performances were often adorned with readings by one of John's dearest friends and colleagues, Professor Dame Gillian Beer, FBA.

The eminence of Stevens as a musicologist, and the exalted reputation he left behind amongst his musicological colleagues, seem all the more remarkable when one considers that he passed his life as a university teacher of English literature. From 1954 until 1974 he was University Lecturer in English in the University of Cambridge, then Reader in English and Musical History from 1974–8. In 1978 he was appointed Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English in the University. (He was Chairman of his Faculty at this time and is remembered as a kindly but firm chairman.) Despite Stevens's profound and sympathetic musicianship, it was the critical traditions of English literary studies that shaped his intellectual temper. Among Cambridge medievalists, his principal models were his predecessor in the chair of Medieval and Renaissance English, J. A. W. Bennett, from whom he borrowed the term 'humane medievalist' that he chose for himself in his Inaugural Lecture

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of 1981,[6] and his predecessor but one in the Chair, C. S. Lewis, whom Stevens thanks in that same Inaugural for 'kindness and illumination'. Like Bennett and Lewis, Stevens was committed to the view that 'certain kinds of historical study are valuable and liberating', a view he expressed in an essay of 1981 for the *Cambridge Review* (on which more below) and a principle he believed to be enshrined in the period papers of the Cambridge English Tripos 'over the last fifty years', which meant a period reaching back to the early 1930s when he wrote those words. There is no doubt that Stevens would have been happy to defend, albeit with due circumspection, the founding and historical principles of the English Tripos as the enduring core of its intellectual and social value through the generations, giving the course the power to absorb and eventually to outlive other approaches. Yet it would be misleading to suggest that Stevens took no interest in new ways of reading and interpreting literature; he had far too much intellectual curiosity to be so quiescent. He attended the seminars on narratology led by Gillian Beer and Frank Kermode and was by all accounts an enthusiastic participant in the discussions that took place. He regarded feminist approaches, which first became prominent at a time when his own intellectual career was well advanced, with some reserve, but he could be very helpful to those who were then exploring them, often by passing on references to relevant essays or to other materials that he had encountered in his reading.

Stevens judiciously relinquished a chance to make a more exposed and theoretical statement of his position when he wrote the essay for *The Cambridge Review*, mentioned above, in the thick of what has become known as the MacCabe affair.[7] This began in late 1980 when a young Assistant Lecturer identified with structuralist methods in his research and teaching failed to win promotion from his untenured position to the post of full Lecturer. In the judgement of some, including Professor Raymond Williams who had lately given an address to an open meeting entitled 'The Crisis in the English Faculty' when Stevens wrote his essay, the situation was grave. A leading daily newspaper even spoke of Cambridge University being 'plunged into turmoil'. Stevens, in a measured and taut response that shows a skilled university politician and a highly conscientious Faculty officer at work, declined to be drawn into

[6] 'The Humane Medievalist' was the title of J. A. W. Bennett's Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English in the University of Cambridge, published under that title by Cambridge University Press in 1965.
[7] 'The state of the English Faculty and the Discussion in the Senate', *The Cambridge Review*, 102 (1981), 188–93.

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making any developed statement of his own position as a critic, no doubt because he recognised that, in the climate then prevailing, it would only appear more personal and *ad hominem* the more he appealed to general intellectual principles and a supposed consensus. Yet in a revealing passage of the essay Stevens does openly condone the view of a colleague, expressed in a debate of the Senate and quoted in the essay, that structuralism and other -isms are 'in some sense irredeemably unimportant . . . in comparison with literature itself'. Even in his Inaugural of 1981, delivered at the height of the MacCabe affair, there is only a discreet reference to 'those linguists who regard language as an essentially arbitrary set of signs'.[8] It would be easy to say that Stevens, in common with many other literary scholars of his day, would have regarded a statement of intellectual principles couched in theoretical terms as an ungracious presumption upon the reader's patience, much as Classical Roman authors might decline to use specialised or technical terms in their prose on the grounds that they breached the decorum of letters. It would be even easier, in the critical climate of the early twenty-first century, to maintain that literary scholars of Stevens's generation in Cambridge (to look no further) believed they read their literary texts as common sense and humane principles demanded, grounded upon a good knowledge of Classical literature and a sound grasp of rhetorical and metrical terminology. Yet it would be nearer the truth to argue instead that Stevens was simply not dogmatic by nature. Tolerant of pluralism in others, he was in that sense a pluralist himself.

What is more, Stevens's books do make his intellectual position and heritage clear. One has only to read any page of his *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (1961) to hear the echoes of the Tolkien and Lewis generation that succeeded in giving a sharp critical edge to the companionable (but now almost unbearably precious) manner of many early-twentieth-century critics. Stevens believed that it was possible to make an apt remark about a piece of writing because there was something stable, but not necessarily bounded, on the page for the critic to share with an imagined company of sympathetic interlocutors. The task of the critic was to entice and persuade the reader with a humane (even a genial) critical language that extended and developed the resources of civil conversation. Hence it is no surprise to discover that Stevens, both as a literary historian and as a musicologist, believed in the Common Reader as a constituency in British cultural life, and he would probably have endorsed

[8] *The Old Sound and the New*, p. 9.

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Frank Kermode's remark that academics who regard their reviewing for daily papers or literary magazines as 'an interference with graver matters need to give some thought to the whole question of the wider literary public on whose existence their own, with its mandarin privileges, must depend'.[9] Stevens maintained this generous position with some tenacity, notably when he became Chairman of the Plainsong and Mediaeval Music Society in 1987, an office in which I had the honour to follow him. This is perhaps the least known and yet in some ways the most revealing of his many undertakings. The Society was founded in 1888, and Stevens respected its founding mission statement of that year, which was to advance 'public education in the art and science of music and in particular plainsong and medieval music'. He deftly steered the Society's journal to the safe haven of Cambridge University Press—which still publishes two numbers a year—and in 1993 a special issue was prepared in his honour and presented to him.

Stevens's commitment to the needs of the Common Reader owed much to his musical interests and activities. Of all the work that can bring the erudite and critical skills of a musicological scholar into sustained and stimulating contact with intelligent but non-academic minds, the editing of music for performance, followed by the experience of performance, is one of the most engaging. It also represents one of the traditions most deeply engrained in British musicology, reaching back to the pioneering work of scholars such as Edmund H. Fellowes (1870–1951), editor of Elizabethan madrigals and lute songs, or Sir Richard Runciman Terry (1868–1938) at Westminster Cathedral, who made the first modern editions of masses by John Taverner, among other Tudor composers, and performed them in the liturgy. The tradition continued into Stevens's lifetime when it touched virtually everything ever accomplished by his thesis supervisor and latterly his friend, Thurston Dart.

At the core of Stevens's scholarly legacy lie the three volumes of late-medieval and early-Tudor music that he edited, always with 'a singing acquaintance' in mind, for the series *Musica Britannica*. In these three handsome and indeed sumptuous volumes, he single-handedly put the greater part of English song before 1550 into print, only passing over the small and in many ways eccentric thirteenth-century corpus (which he hoped all his life to edit afresh) and a body of fifteenth-century polyphonic songs, in scattered sources, that still await an editor. The first of Stevens's editions to be published in *Musica Britannica*, volume IV of the

[9] Frank Kermode, *An Appetite for Poetry: Essays in Literary Interpretation* (London, 1989), p. 3.

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series, is entitled *Mediaeval Carols* and is arguably the most revealing of all his three contributions to the series. The edition was originally conceived as a musical complement to the text-only edition of the carol repertory, published by Richard Leighton Greene as far back as 1935,[10] and seemingly the first publication in modern times to identify the carol as a poetic form in which a refrain or burden comes first, comes last, and appears between every stanza. Carol poetry encompasses a great range of themes and subjects, including some major feasts of the liturgical year (Christmas included), love and social satire. The tone is often convivial, for many of the carols appear to be poetry for the hall where the guests, having been admitted by the marshal, enjoy the pleasures of wine and food. The repertory of carols with musical settings is somewhat narrower in tone, ranging from simple (yet ingratiating) monophonic songs up to elaborate four-part settings with intricate counterpoint probably intended for chaplains and boys to sing in aristocratic or collegiate halls, yet usually retaining what Stevens calls a 'vigorous rhythmic drive . . . warmth and sonority . . . signs of a moral directness that might almost be called didactic' (p. xv). That, as one would expect, is a very apt characterisation.

Mediaeval Carols was first published in 1952, showing that Stevens must have been working on the material almost immediately after the end of his undergraduate years and during his time as a Bye-Fellow and Research Fellow at Magdalene. The book represents the dawn of his academic career, yet one should not underestimate the impression he must already have made upon Dart, among others, revealed by the invitation to contribute a volume to *Musica Britannica*, an 'authoritative national collection of the classics of British music' dedicated to the Sovereign. (It is easy to forget that Dart was actually Stevens's contemporary.) One only need scan the Preface to the edition, or indeed the earliest reviews, to be transported back to the world of musicological research that Stevens was just entering, one where experience of performance was considered necessary for any serious musical scholar. In the Preface to *Mediaeval Carols*, Stevens offers warm thanks (sounding a characteristic note in the process) to 'my friends, the Cambridge Singers', with whom he had evidently been exploring the music of the carols in performance. He also expresses his gratitude to Dart. The Introduction, in turn, advocates the unique value of a 'singing' acquaintance with the carols for anyone who wishes to appreciate their variety. Similar sentiments are expressed in the very extensive and collaborative review of the edition, published in the

[10] R. L. Greene, *The Early English Carols* (Oxford, 1935).

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Journal of the American Musicological Society for 1953 and written by Manfed F. Bukofzer and Richard Leighton Greene. (One notes, in passing, that two scholars of great eminence in different fields were required to do justice to Stevens's first edition of music.) In this review, which Stevens rightly called 'scrupulous and constructive', but which must nonetheless have been an alarming sight to a scholar publishing his first edition, Bukofzer praised the 'happy combination of scholarly and practical considerations' that the editor had achieved, while Greene expressed the hope that 'all students of the carol . . . will seek out this work and call in the help of musical friends for the performance of the polyphonic pieces'. Both had their reservations about the editions, as was only to be expected, and Stevens published a revised edition of *Mediaeval Carols* in 1958 to take account of far-reaching suggestions that Bukofzer had made, complete with a remarkably candid admission that the older scholar had drawn his attention to some fundamental misconceptions. Not every user of the revised edition will necessarily be convinced that this *mea culpa*, emphatic but not ostentatious, was entirely necessary, or even that the changes in the revised edition of *Mediaeval Carols*, especially in the matter of barring, were for the better.[11] On balance, however, the joint authors of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* review, which eclipses all others in its scope and extent, were warm in their praise of Stevens's work. Bukofzer found most of the musical editions impeccable; Greene thought the work on the carol texts first rate.[12]

The second and third of Stevens's monumental editions, *Music at the Court of Henry VIII* and *Early Tudor Songs and Carols* appeared in 1962 and 1975 as *Musica Britannica*, XVIII and XXXVI respectively. Both are dedicated to the contents of single manuscripts, the former presenting the contents of British Library Additional MS 31922, commonly known as 'Henry VIII's manuscript', and the latter giving the songs of the slightly earlier Fayrfax manuscript, now British Library Additional MS 5465. To compare the two is to learn much about the tastes and sympathies that shaped the curve of Stevens's academic career. As a literary scholar, he

[11] Some of the energy required might have been devoted to producing literary texts for the underlay that look more like fifteenth-century English and which preserve rhymes, even at the cost of the accessibility that Stevens valued so highly. Stevens retains the Middle English words of the carols but modernises their form, so that rhymes are sometimes obliterated as in *Christianity/thee . . . man/then . . . pity/me* in the underlay for *Christianité/thee . . . man/than(ne) . . . pité/me*, and many more. It remains unknown whether this policy was one of his own devising; it certainly violates a number of principles that he held dear.

[12] Bukofzer had a *Musica Britannica* volume of his own going through the press at the time, his edition of the works of Dunstaple.

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responded warmly to the entire range of medieval English writing from at least Chaucer onwards (his published work gives little sign of engagement with Old English). Yet as a musical scholar, he was primarily interested in Western monophonic music from its ninth-century 'beginnings' in Gregorian chant until the later fifteenth century; his interests in medieval polyphony did not really begin until the course of musical history reached the 1440s and the earliest English carols.

It will be worth pausing over what this means. Stevens rarely chose to engage with the large repertory of thirteenth-century French motets, perhaps because the literary scholar in him did not relish the experience of hearing two or three texts, sometimes in two languages, sung simultaneously; he also found the high level of dissonance in these motets less than alluring. The same objections kept him away from the polyphonic conductus. Polytextual motets of the fourteenth century did not detain him much, partly because he had only moderate enthusiasm (I believe that is a fair comment) for the essentially cerebral technique of isorhythm.[13] The large and often exotic repertory of the French Ars Nova chanson, with Guillaume de Machaut (d. 1377) as the chief figure, or the extensive polyphonic repertoire of the Italian Trecento, did not excite any consistent interest in him, and he once evoked, perhaps without much true admiration, the 'hard brilliance of certain *ars nova* songs' (xvi).[14] In place of these, Stevens's chosen domain was the immense field of medieval monophonic song in Latin, Middle English, Middle High German, Galician-Portuguese, Old Occitan, Old French and Middle 'Italian'. He achieved a degree of control, and a breadth of coverage, in this vast area to rival or even exceed the old masters like Friedrich Gennrich.

Of the two editions under discussion here, it is *Music at the Court of Henry VIII* that also reveals most about Stevens's extraordinary industry and achievement. The manuscript was probably compiled during the early years of the reign when Henry was, in Stevens's view, 'a young and happily married king' preoccupied with his sports. As one turns the leaves of the manuscript, intricate pieces of Franco-Flemish polyphony, including some adapted versions of the most widely circulated songs of the later

[13] One should add here that much of the surviving English polyphonic music from Chaucer's lifetime, whether in the form of motet, cantilena or any other, was not available in adequate scholarly editions during the greater part of his academic career.

[14] Stevens's most sustained engagement with the music of Guillaume de Machaut appears in his essay 'The "Music" of the Lyric: Machaut, Deschamps, Chaucer', published in P. Boitani and A. Torti (eds.), *Medieval and Pseudo-Medieval Literature* (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1984), pp. 109–29. Two musical items are discussed, but it is very telling that they are both monophonic.

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fifteenth century, appear side by side with native consort pieces for instruments, some of them very brief and perhaps originally designed for use in pageants, chivalric disguisings or interludes, others showing a much greater intricacy, including the immense instrumental fantasia *Fa la sol* by Cornysh that evokes the extraordinary filigree work of the Eton Choirbook composers. The English music in the manuscript includes a substantial number of songs by composers now forgotten (such as Farthing, Lloyd, Daggere, Kempe), but best represented of all is the composer who is very well remembered for other things: King Henry VIII.

The project required Stevens to transcribe and edit a substantial corpus of pieces (109 items in all) representing some seventy years of art music as it was cultivated in England, or received there from the Continent, and to present the entire repertory in print for the first time. There was little to build upon except a few pieces in anthologies or studies from the 1930s and 1940s; Stevens even had to look back to William Chappell's work of 1865–7 for transcriptions of some items. Once again, the Preface to this edition records warm thanks to Thurston Dart 'who first introduced me to the arts of transcribing and editing old music', but now gratitude is also expressed to a wider range of scholars beyond Cambridge who had already achieved eminence, or were destined for it, including Daniel Heartz, Gustave Reese and Brian Trowell. Yet what is truly impressive about *Music at the Court of Henry VIII* is the richness of the introduction, which draws deeply on Stevens's first monograph, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court*, published the previous year in 1961. This most elegant and companionable book, arguably the best thing that Stevens ever accomplished outside of his editions, reconstructs the social milieu of the music and poetry in Henry VIII's manuscript, and to lay the monograph and the edition side by side is not only to sense the extraordinary industry of this busy university lecturer throughout the later 1950s, it is also to appreciate the enormous strides in the study of Early-Tudor song that Stevens had been able to make in a field of musical history that was wide open and now mostly his own. To produce his richly textured account of music and poetry under the early Tudors, Stevens drew deeply upon his reading of English poetry and prose from Chaucer onwards, using it to reconstruct the imaginative and social experience of courtiers in a milieu that he rightly perceived to be essentially 'medieval' and 'French' up to and including the years when the manuscript was compiled (p. xxi). Consider, for example, Stevens's brief sketch, in the Introduction to the edition, of the changes in English court music and court culture during the later sixteenth century:

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> The influence of Italian culture, which culminated in the Elizabethan madrigal and sonnet, superseded an 'international' French culture signified by the basse-danse, the 'castle-of-love' disguising, courts of love, chivalric ceremonies and pastimes of all kinds, the 'Chaucer tradition' in amorous verse, an esoteric professionalism amongst musicians, widespread techniques of improvisation used both by itinerant minstrels and by amateurs, the traditional pre-eminence of the harp, the use of fixed forms for composition (*rondeau*, *virelai*, carol) and so on.

More than forty years on, it would be difficult to improve on this masterly synthesis that reaches out beyond the musical sources to a richly imagined social context of entertainment, drama, dance and ceremony. It is underwritten by Stevens's profound appreciation of what it means to evoke a 'chivalric' culture where tournaments and disguisings might be loud with resonances from Chaucer, Malory and the great French prose romances. One also notes the author's characteristic vigilance towards musical traditions (such as the use of the harp at court during the fifteenth century rather than the lute, whose fortunes rose from the 1480s onwards) that can only be recovered from literary or archival sources because they have left no readily identifiable trace in the musical manuscripts.

In 1973, Stevens published his only book of purely literary criticism, entitled *Medieval Romance*, acknowledging the generous help of two Cambridge colleagues, Dr Richard Axton[15] and Professor Derek Brewer. Here Stevens sounds his characteristic and welcome note of sympathy for the Common Reader who may be inclined to suppose that he or she cannot expect to be beguiled, moved or even diverted by medieval literature. 'Medieval romance', Stevens comments, 'has for too long, like other branches of medieval writing, been regarded as the property of specialists' (p. 9). The book is an urbane and elegant justification of a claim that Stevens had polished during years of lecturing to undergraduates who were inclined to suppose that medieval romance must be something very strange and remote indeed. He argues that the themes of medieval romance are essentially those of narrative fiction in all times. Its concerns with love, death, test and vindication are 'fundamental and permanent' (p. 17). Stevens deploys an extraordinary range of reading to illustrate this claim, and it is always aptly done as when he proposes, for example,

[15] With Dr Axton, Stevens produced a noted translation of some medieval French drama, entitled *Medieval French Plays* (Oxford, 1971).

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that the amorous conversation or *luf-talkyng* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reflects, *mutatis mutandis*, a social reality comparable to the world evoked in Elizabethan court comedy, in the social comedy of the Restoration wits, in Jane Austen's *Emma* (the exchanges with Frank Churchill) or in the drawing room comedies of Oscar Wilde (pp. 188–9).

Stevens's third and last monograph, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama 1050–1350*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1986. Much inspired by the literary work of another distinguished colleague in Cambridge, Professor Peter Dronke, FBA, this large book offers the first comprehensive discussion of medieval song repertoires surviving with music in all the European languages. Its recurrent concern, already announced in the Inaugural Lecture of 1981 and in a sense present from the very beginning of Stevens's scholarly career—even from his birth to a violinist and a mathematician—is that the fundamental aesthetic of medieval song was numerical: a profound accord between the number of syllables in a poem, the number of notes, the pattern of the rhymes, and more besides.[16] On this interpretation, the pleasure that these songs offered their original listeners was one of deep and pervasive accord. This notion, which owes a great deal to medieval theories of *musica* as the art of sounding number, to say nothing of the Greek tradition upon which medieval ideas were based, was of special importance to Stevens because he believed that it revealed the way text and music came together in an expressive manner in medieval song. The composer's task, he argued, was to set the form of the poem, not the meaning, and if the task were correctly accomplished, then both the words and the music would bring their own, complementary *harmonia* to the experience of the song for both performer and listener. The relation between words and music was therefore not expressive, in later senses of the term, because the composers did not seek metaphorical equivalents in sound for the meaning of the text.[17]

It is difficult to assess the impact of this large and rich book, now more than twenty years old. The reviews, all commissioned from scholars of the front rank, were often very admiring. Professor Richard Crocker,

[16] These had long been major concerns of Stevens's work; see especially '*La Grande Chanson Courtoise*: the Songs of Adam de la Halle', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 101 (1974–5), 11–30.

[17] Stevens used the term 'metaphorical' in this context to mean, for example, the 'expression' of sadness or melancholy by falling melodic lines, rather than the use of a mimetic vocal effect to mark a word like *Hélas*, a technique that he regarded as a form of onomatopoeia. The usage is discussed at length in his Inaugural Lecture, *The Old Sound and the New*.

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of the University of California at Berkeley, and as distinguished a reviewer as any editor could hope to secure for such a study, called it 'one of the most fruitful contributions to a general understanding of medieval music in recent times'.[18] One notes the reservation implied by Crocker's allusion to a *general* understanding of medieval music. *Words and Music in the Middle Ages* perhaps tries to do too much, and there is substance in the remark of another distinguished reviewer, Professor David G. Hughes, that a survey so broad must inevitably be based upon scholarship of very uneven depth, and that there is therefore a sense in which 'no one is yet in a position to write this book'.[19] One might add that few were in a position to review it, whence even the most eminent reviewers can be seen moving quickly to the parts of Stevens's broad picture that they know well and leaving the rest aside or mentioning it only in passing.

Words and Music in the Middle Ages was not the last of Stevens's monographs. There was another, but one that he was never to see in print. For most of his career, he nurtured plans to explore the tri-lingual song culture of medieval England by editing all the songs with Latin, English and Anglo-Norman texts surviving from before *c.*1300. He called the projected book by the mischievously unlovely acronym *SLEME*, or 'Songs and Lyrics of Early-Medieval England'. In the last six years of his life he began to recognise that he would never complete these labours, and some of the fruits began to appear as journal articles, notably a detailed study of the widely disseminated song *Samson dux fortissime* and a checklist of Anglo-Norman lyrics surviving with music.[20] Then he resolved—for there are some kinds of optimism that even age cannot cure—that he would produce an edition of the most remarkable of all the sources that *SLEME* would have encompassed: the grim and untidy little booklet of songs, mostly in Latin, that is now Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 1. 17 (1). He was by now well into his seventies, and had long since retired from his Professorship. He estimated that the edition would take about two years, but it remained unfinished at his death in 2002.

It is easy to see why. The manuscript presents a great many difficulties. For the most part, it is poorly written, and the leaves are stained in some places or otherwise damaged. There are many textual corruptions in the

[18] *Music and Letters*, 68 (1987), 364–6.
[19] *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 42 (1989), 407.
[20] '*Samson dux fortissime*: an International Latin Song', *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, 1 (1992), 1–40; 'Alphabetical Checklist of Anglo-Norman Songs *c.*1150– *c.*1350', *Plainsong and Medieval Music*, 3 (1994), 1–22.

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poems, while the notation of the music raises numerous problems of detail and editorial principle that touch upon some of the most controversial issues in medieval musicology. Nonetheless, Stevens made substantial progress with the project during the last years of his life. He was able to consult the original virtually every day, for it was housed just down the road from his Cambridge home, and he gave the work his undivided attention. A grant from the British Academy allowed him to employ a team of graduates who brought fresh and sharp eyes to many aspects of the project under his supervision. At the time of his death, he had established the Latin texts and written very substantial parts of an introduction and commentary. He also finalised the translations with the help of Dr Leofranc Holford-Strevens of Oxford University Press, and at about this time I was able to place in his hands a complete recording of the music in the manuscript on a two-CD set, eventually edited down to a single CD and released on the Hyperion label.[21]

After Stevens's death on 14 February 2002, Dr Margaret Bent, with the help of Dr Richard Axton, established a first textual basis for the final stages of the edition, and it is due to Dr Bent's initiative and coordination that the work on Stevens's unfinished manuscript could be brought to completion. In accordance with his wishes, Professor Karl Reichl of the University of Bonn accepted the task of sorting and editing the materials; he also completed the list of manuscripts and the bibliography, which was a very substantial labour. In much of this work he was greatly helped by Dr Bonnie J. Blackburn. The final version of the Foreword to the book, which I had the privilege to write, names some fifteen people who worked on the project, and even so is far from exhaustive. It is now in print, a tribute to the author and to the continuing devotion of those whom he mentored and inspired.[22]

Stevens became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1975. He was awarded a CBE for services to musicology in 1980. From 1983 until his retirement in 1988 he was President of Magdalene.

Turning the pages of John's personal copy of *Music at the Court of Henry VIII*, which he wished me to have, I am reminded of some words written by another distinguished pupil from Christ's Hospital whom I have had cause to mention once before: Samuel Taylor Coleridge. John

[21] *The Earliest Songbook in England*, Gothic Voices, Hyperion CDA 67177.

[22] *The Later Cambridge Songs: An English Song Collection of the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 2005).

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Stevens 'continued my friend with a fidelity unconquered by time or even by my own apparent neglect, a friend from whom I never received an advice that was not wise, nor a remonstrance that was not gentle and affectionate'.

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