

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

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| <p><b>Institution:</b> University of York</p>   |
| <p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35: Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</p>   |
| <p><b>Title of case study:</b> The Dowland Project: John Potter</p>   |
| <p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>With a series of three CDs, created by his ensemble The Dowland Project on the ECM label, Dr John Potter succeeded in bringing early vocal music that was formerly the preserve of the 'classical' concert hall into the realm of contemporary practice, including jazz. The CDs and the public performances that followed them, influenced the creative practice of leading professional musicians from both sides of the jazz/classical divide, and directly inspired the creation of an innovative digital work by Ambrose Field (<i>Being Dufay</i>), which has itself received international acclaim through CD reviews and public performance in significant venues. Potter's work has played a significant part in the preservation and reinvigoration of musical heritage, while proposing and demonstrating a new creative approach to early music.</p>   |
| <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Dr John Potter was a lecturer and Reader in the Department of Music at the University of York from 1997 to 2010. Throughout that time his research centred on the examination and re-assessment of performance practice in vocal music, seen both as historical phenomenon and contemporary challenge. His 1998 book <i>Vocal Authority</i> (CUP 1998; repr. 2006) probes the ideological bases underlying orthodoxies in both classical and popular music singing, a theme which informs his later writing on the specific subjects of portamento (a technique of gliding between notes, much used well into the last century, but abandoned in modern classical performance) and on the history of the tenor voice. ('Beggars at the Door: the rise and fall of portamento in singing', <i>Music &amp; Letters</i>, 87/4 (2006); <i>Tenor: History of a Voice</i> (Yale University Press, 2009).</p> <p>Importantly, Dr Potter's significant contribution to scholarship in this area was complemented by an equally rigorous and arguably even more influential programme of practice-based research, through a continuous series of innovative performance projects, both as singer/director and as record producer. With his vocal ensemble <i>Red Byrd</i> he made six CDs during the period, of medieval music (including 12<sup>th</sup> century Notre Dame composers Leoninus and Perotinus) and of contemporary music including first performances. With the internationally famous <i>Hilliard Ensemble</i> he was also instrumental in the discovery and recovery of early music, and notably their recordings of Medieval and Renaissance polyphony accompanied by the jazz saxophonist Jan Garbarek (1994 <i>Officium</i>) which became an international best seller, receiving five gold discs. He mentored the group <i>Trio Mediaeval</i>, and produced their five ECM albums, with which the group have won awards and toured across Europe and the USA.</p> <p>Potter's rejection of the concept of authentic performing style, and his arguments for the creative input of the performer even within the performance of the accepted canon of 'classical' music, led him in 2000 to devise, with Manfred Eicher of ECM, a practical laboratory in which the music of John Dowland (1563–1626) could be explored in just such an iconoclastic way. Bringing together highly regarded baroque music specialists Stephen Stubbs and Maya Homburger, and senior jazz improvisers John Surman and Barry Guy, Dowland's songs became the raw material for tracks which, to varying degrees, re-invented the music and presented it in a new, contemporary, guise. The success of the album <i>In Darkness Let Me Dwell</i>, both commercially and in purely artistic terms, led to a further collaboration, <i>Care Charming Sleep</i>, in which the same ensemble of musicians (The Dowland Project) explored music by other early baroque composers (Monteverdi, Purcell, Johnson and others).</p> <p>In 2008 Potter directed a third album, <i>Romaria</i>, in which the project explored repertoire ranging from Gregorian chant and the 13th century Carmina Burana manuscript to Josquin Desprez and</p> |

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Portuguese traditional song, and also took further the degree of performer intervention, giving the musicians only the vocal melody as material on which to base their improvisations. This third project, while it moves the classical singer into territory as far removed from the idea of historical authenticity as could be imagined, is in many ways the logical outcome of an extended engagement with historical data on the one hand (represented by the meticulous scholarship of Potter's books and articles), and the ground-breaking practical exploration of early music, at the highest professional level, over the same period.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### Books:

Potter, J *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press (1998 rpr. 2006) [Submitted as output to RAE 2001 as part of the department's 5A rated submission]

Potter, J *Tenor: History of a Voice* Yale University Press, (2009)  
[Major monograph and the first comprehensive history of the development of the tenor voice.]

#### Article:

'Beggars at the Door: the rise and fall of portamento in singing', *Music & Letters*, 87/4 (2006) DOI: 10.1093/ml/gcl079 [Submitted as output to RAE 2008 as part of the department's submission (which was assessed as 91% 2\* or above)]

#### CDs:

*Romaria*, The Dowland Project. ECM New Series 1970 476 5780 (2008)

*Care Charming Sleep*. The Dowland Project. ECM New Series 1803 (2001)

*In Darkness Let Me Dwell*. The Dowland Project. ECM New Series 1697 (2000)

*Officium*. The Hilliard Ensemble & Jan Garbarek (saxophone), ECM 1525 445369-2 (1994)

*Dowland Project: Night sessions*. ECM New Series release date June 2013

[ECM is one of the leading CD labels worldwide and known for its innovative catalogue. *In Darkness Let me Dwell* was submitted as output to RAE 2001 as part of the department's 5A rated submission.]

*Publications without a DOI are available on request.*

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dr Potter's work has been a key influence in changing attitudes of both professional performers and the listening public in respect of the performance and reception of 'early' music. As he points out in his chapter 'Beyond the Mainstream' in *A History of Singing* (2012), p. 231, 'during the 1990s the concept of authenticity gave way to the idea of performances being "historically informed".... and the looser ideology made it easier for performers to be creative.' Potter himself was at the forefront of this new approach, and epitomised the integration of historical discovery and innovative performance. While his books and articles brought his ideas to an academic and pedagogic audience throughout the world, with *Vocal Authority* appearing on library shelves and university reading lists in several countries, his recordings and live performances with Red Byrd and The Hilliard Ensemble turned his research into practice, and disseminated it to audiences both within and far beyond academia.

Through his work with the Hilliard Ensemble he won the respect of Manfred Eicher, the autocratic founder and director of ECM records, whose reputation is second to none in the realm of Jazz recordings, and whose 'New' series began to forge connections with classical music, and in particular with early music and experimental new music. Eicher's recognition of Potter's imaginative ideas concerning the performance of early music led him to propose the combination

of early music and jazz instrumentalists as an accompaniment for Dowland songs. The musicians assembled had not played together before, and in the case of Stubbs and Surman had not previously crossed the jazz/classical divide. The Dowland Project is in this sense both research and impact: the professional producer (Eicher) and musicians (Stubbs, Surman, Guy and Homburger) were led to an original forum for creative experiment through the research ideas of Dr Potter.

The impact of the CDs is demonstrated by:

- Reviews in a variety of music publications, internationally, both classical and jazz based. *In Darkness let me Dwell is a rarity: a crossover project that is both defensible and listenable...Mr. Potter and company have added new instruments to old in readings balanced between the orthodox and the radical... New York Times* (full list of reviews available).
- Commercial success evidenced by significant awards e.g. *In Darkness let me Dwell: Sunday Times Record of the Year 2001*; No 5 in the *New York Times* list of best records of the year; cited in Manfred Eicher's *Grammy nomination*; *Audio* (Germany) Classic CD of the Month.
- Public broadcast and continuing live performances at international festivals including Bremen, New York, Munich, Radovljica. All live performances have taken place in public rather than institutional venues, and at major musical centres and festivals (including a broadcast on Czech television). (Full list of performances available.)
- Manfred Eicher's support for a second, third and fourth Dowland Project CD on ECM following the initial Dowland disc (*Care Charming Sleep: 2002, Romaria: 2008, Night Sessions: 2013*) demonstrates that the project is both commercially and artistically successful in the eyes of ECM.
- Potter's emphasis on 'freeing the music of its historical context' (Potter: notes for *Romaria 2008*), has influenced the performances of Barry Guy and Maya Homburger, whose recitals now regularly combine baroque and contemporary performance with improvisation (e.g. CD *Dakryon: Maya Recordings 2005 DDD MCD0501*). Potter's series of interpretations of Dowland were an important build up to the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dowland's birth in 2013.
- Potter's work had a direct influence on the composer Ambrose Field, who created his large-scale composition *Being Dufay* around fragments of chansons by Dufay (1397–1474) sung by John Potter. Although Potter sings the vocal fragments, the piece was not a collaborative composition. It appeared in 2009 as a single artist CD by Ambrose Field on the ECM label. Subsequently, the piece has been toured, with projected images by the artist Mick Lynch, and performed at major music festivals. In the live event, John Potter contributes vocal improvisation on the Dufay fragments, in the manner of the Dowland Project improvisations. The composition (CD) and live performances are claimed as demonstrating further impact arising from the Dowland Project. Sales for 2009–2010: Legal digital downloads: 17,283 (accurate). Physical CD media: 13,760 (approximate).

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

CD Reviews [for The Dowland Project](#) from Early Music News, Early Music Review, Sunday Times, International Record Review, Gramophone, Rheinische Post, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Südkurie, Stereo and Diapason can be accessed here:

[http://www.ecmrecords.com/Press\\_Reactions/New\\_Series/1800/Pressreaction\\_1803.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Press_Reactions/New_Series/1800/Pressreaction_1803.php)

[http://www.ecmrecords.com/Press\\_Reactions/New\\_Series/1900/Pressreactions\\_1970.php](http://www.ecmrecords.com/Press_Reactions/New_Series/1900/Pressreactions_1970.php)

[Full list of reviews available on request.](#)

[The Dowland Project performances – full list available on request](#)

Barry Guy and Maya Homburger:

<http://www.freejazzblog.org/2012/11/maya-homburger-barry-guy-tales-of.html>

Ambrose Field: **CD** *Being Dufay* ECM New Series 2071 476 6948 (2009)

Being Dufay selected reviews (several more available):

<http://www.musicalcriticism.com/recordings/cd-being-dufay-0309.shtml>

<http://www.allmusic.com/album/ambrose-field-being-dufay-mw0001867154>

<http://triskelarts.ticketsolve.com/shows/126514703/events>

Being Dufay live performances include:

Vienna Konzerthaus, Austria, 21.01.09; Teatro Donizetti Bergamo, Italy, 31.05.09; Perth International Festival, Australia, 11.02.10; Chicago Early Music Festival, USA, 20.04.10; Teatro Maria Matos, Lisbon, 31.03.10; Dancity Festival, Foligno, Italy, 26.06.2010; Konvergence Festival, Design Factory, Bratislava, 24. 09. 2010; Contemporanea International Festival, Rome. 26.02. 2011; Pakkahuone, Tampere Vocal Music Festival, Finland, 08.06,2011; A-Capella Festival, Leipzig, Germany. 26.03.2012