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July, 1977

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The Madrigals of Thomas Morley
A Survey

by DANIEL R. SALOTTI

Thomas Morley (1558-1603), pupil of William Byrd, theorist, and established London musician, was one of the most original exponents of the English madrigal school. His total output in this genre numbers over one hundred pieces. Works which he collected and published in addition to his own are contained in three volumes: *Canzonets to four voices selected out of the best Italian authors* (1597) (published in the same year as the second edition of Yonge's *Musica Transalpina*); *Madrigals to five voices selected out of the best Italian authors* (1598); and *The Triumphs of Oriana* (1601). In 1597 Morley published his treatise, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, which has remained one of the most significant sources of the time for information on notation, counterpoint, the musical forms, and English musical life of the Late Renaissance.

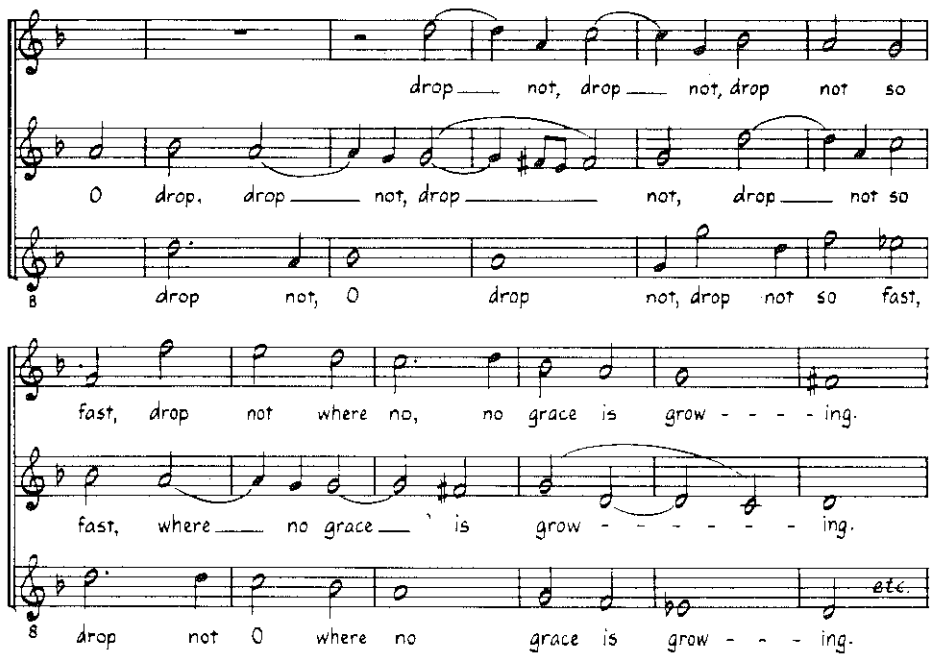
Morley was granted a Bachelor of Music degree in 1588 by Oxford University. In the same year he was appointed organist of St. Giles Church in London. Later he became organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, and in 1592 he was appointed to the Chapel Royal. Morley remained a fellow of the Chapel Royal until 1602, when, for reasons of health, he resigned. Toward the end of his life he resided — like Shakespeare — in the parish of St. Helen's, and it was while he lived there that Queen Elizabeth granted him the privilege of a license to publish music.

Morley's earliest volume of original works, *Canzonets or little short songs to three voices* (1593), was variously republished. It consisted of twenty compositions (four more were added in a 1606 edition), nearly all of which express Morley's preference for light-hearted texts. "Cease, mine eyes, cease your lamenting," somewhat of an exception to the predominantly spirited pieces in the volume, contains many instances of Morley's highly expressive presentation of the text. To quote a typical example, the words of the second couplet,

> Drop not, O drop not where no grace is growing!

are depicted by falling melodic lines in lengthened note values (Ex. 1).

EXAMPLE 1

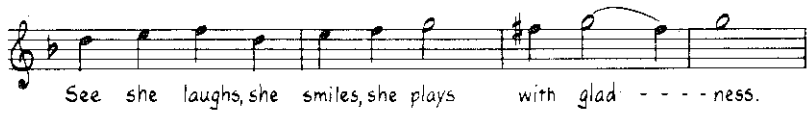


The next couplet

> She smiles, she plays with joy and gladness
> She laughs to see your grief and sadness.

reverts to an ascending phrase in short notes (Ex. 2). Throughout the piece, countless examples of the clashing of the raised and lowered third underline the conflict.

EXAMPLE 2



Morley's "text awareness" produced more dramatic examples with the publication of his second volume, *First book of Madrigals to four voices* (1594). In the madrigal "Hark! jolly shepherds" (dealing with the subject of morris-dancing), the listener finds himself immediately surrounded by the unmistakable sound of dancing bells,

their typical ring arising from quick imitation of scale motifs against repeated sustained tones.

Morley, like his contemporaries John Wilbye, Thomas Weelkes, and John Hilton, wrote ballets — dancing songs identified by their "fa-la" or other refrain syllable patterns. The form was popular in Italy, and through the efforts of Morley (using Giovanni Gastoldi's "fa-las" as a model) was adopted in England.

Ballets follow a bipartite structure. Each section begins with a homophonic setting immediately followed by a refrain in lively, imitative counterpoint with dance-like rhythms set to the nonsense syllables. Strophic in organization, ballets would begin in duple meter, change to triple meter, and return to duple meter to conclude a section.

Morley's 1595 volume, *First book of Ballets to five voices* (published again in 1600), contains twenty-one pieces, of which only the first fifteen are actually ballets — some of Morley's best-known pieces are contained in this group, e.g., "Now is the month of Maying," "Sing we and chant it," "My bonny lass she smileth," "Fire, fire" — the remaining pieces being more elaborate madrigals. Nevertheless, the stylistic differences between the various forms of Morley's part songs remain slight.

Morley's own description of the canzonet in his *Plaine and Easie Introduction* is indicative:

> The second degree of gravity (after the madrigal) in this light music is given to canzonets, that is little short songs (wherein little art can be shewed: being made in strains, the beginning of which is some point lightly touched, and every strain repeated except the middle) which is in composition of the music a counterfeit of the madrigal.[1]

Morley composed canzonets for two, three, five, and six voices. (Oddly enough in this instance he did not emulate his Italian models, for most Italian canzonets were written in four parts.) They are usually ternary in form with the first and last sections repeated, and are strophic. While less formal and contrapuntally intricate than the madrigal, they are somewhat more complex than ballets.

Morley's last two published volumes of part songs were made up entirely of canzonets. The *First book of canzonets to two voices* (1595) is truly unique among works of the kind in England. Joseph Kerman states in his book on *The Elizabethan Madrigal*, "the form that these (two-part) canzonets take is more analogous to the Italian *bicinia* — pieces used by children or by beginning voice or instrumental students." They are some of the finest two-part works in the polyphonic style of the High Renaissance.

[1] *Op. cit.*, 180.

The *Canzonets or little short airs to five and six voices* of 1597 was the only English madrigal book to be published with a lute part. It foreshadowed Morley's last collection of secular works, the *Ayres . . . to sing and play to the Lute* (1600). The continuo practice of the Baroque began to overtake the golden age of English polyphony.

The first great period of the English madrigal school had ended. The works of Thomas Weelkes and John Wilbye followed; both continued in their madrigals, published within a few years of Morley's works, the tradition established by Morley, but they also experimented with more daring melodic and harmonic means in the manner of the Italians Gesualdo and Marenzio.

The madrigal never quite left the English scene in later periods, but its classical height was reached with the decade that marked the end of Morley's life.

Notes on Renaissance Performance Practice

by JOEL KRAMME

Since such cities as Florence and Venice served as models of Renaissance society in the richness and variety of their musical lives, it is helpful to refer to the records of their churches in order to gain some understanding of the development of sacred polyphonic singing during the fifteenth century.

Because of the abundance of such sources, one can gather an accurate description of sacred choral organizations. But one cannot assume the information will always be complete, for the extant records of churches and private households of influential merchants such as the Medici generally list matters of financial concern, not necessarily of historical importance. While the records of a particular church may indicate a paid choir membership of six, local talented singers were known to participate in such organizations without apparent financial remuneration. This problem becomes particularly acute when attempting an accurate accounting of the disposition of voices within a choir, for often the young choristers were given no stipend for their services as singers, the professional training received being their only reward.[1] Even when the boys were listed in the church records, it cannot always be assumed that they were assigned to the *cantus* or *discantus*, since singing of lower parts was apparently practiced by those whose voices and reading ability qualified.

Wealthy patrons often had a noteworthy influence upon the employment practices of the local parishes. The extent to which singers were shared by all musical establishments within the city is never fully documented; although records indicate the practice to have been at least as prevalent as it is today.

When investigating the statistics found in church records, one final fact must be considered. Like their modern counterparts,

[1]Frank F. D'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XIV (Fall 1961), p. 329.

Renaissance musicians frequently served in other capacities as well. Singers were usually identified by their place of origin. In addition, each choir inventory registers a small but consistent number of clerics who were probably affiliated with the church in question beyond their musical service. Other clerics, for whom the vows of poverty might have been rigorously applied, very likely also served as singers, but their names would not normally have appeared in the church account books.

In general, the development of sacred choral singing — as opposed to the use of solo ensembles — coincides with the emergence of the Renaissance. The shift from one medium to the other is as gradual and as subtle as the change from the non-blend to blend ideal in music and from the two-dimensional to the three-dimensional perspective in art.

The most reliable clues to be used in establishing the years of transition from solo to choral ensembles are found in the music itself. There is the shift from small to large size choir book format. The rhythmical complexity of the earlier music calls for the highly skilled soloist while the reserved rhythm of Dufay and other early fifteenth-century composers could easily be performed by singers generally familiar with the principles of mensural notation. Also, the rhythmical inequality of parts in the earlier motet style suggests a dichotomy of singing abilities that is not present in most sacred music of the fifteenth century.[2]

Very little concrete information is available regarding the usual size of church choirs during the first half of the fifteenth century. In 1438, Cosimo Medici instructed his brother Lorenzo, who was in Ferrara at the time, to "engage a *magister capelle* and three singers or more, as is deemed necessary for the chapel, and that he may have the authority to spend up to two hundred florins yearly for the said singers." Lorenzo succeeded in hiring the Magister and three other male singers. During the next decade, the membership of the choir fluctuated considerably, never being fewer than four nor more than six singers.[3]

Larger choirs of ten or more (including boy choristers) were not common in the Florentine churches until the latter quarter of the fifteenth century. While the Papal and Burgundian chapels were purported to have had at least twenty singers during the first half of the century, such ensembles were not the norm in most churches.

[2]See Archibald T. Davison and Willi Apel, *Historical Anthology of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 44-82.

[3]D'Accone, *op. cit.*, taken from Document No. 1 Archivio dell' Opera de Santa Maria del Fiore, Firenze, Deliberazioni, II, 2, 2, fol. 49^{r}.

The growth of polyphonic choirs in Florence during the second half of the fifteenth century was affected greatly by the popularity of imported Northern singers. As early as 1446 the records indicate that the membership of the Baptistry choir consisted nearly exclusively of Northern singers, a situation that apparently resulted in the resignation of the Italian director. With the infusion of singers whose talents surpassed those of the local musicians, a cadre of reliable section leaders was established.

The ever increasing size and complexity of polyphonic choirs and music did not evolve without marked resistance by some influential clergy and lay leaders. Fra Girolamo Savonarola, whose influence in Florentine politics dates from 1490 when he was apparently invited by Lorenzo de Medici to take up residence in the city, delivered many inspiring sermons against the luxury, paganism, and corruption of the times. His views toward sacred polyphony were equally as severe:

> God says: take away all your beautiful figural music: these gentlemen have chapels of singers which seem like a rabble... because there stands a singer with a large voice like a calf's and the others howl around him like dogs, and no one understands what they are saying. Let figural music go, and sing the plainchant ordered by the church![4]

It is significant that all forms of polyphony were banned from the Cathedral of Santa Maria during the years of Savonarola's spiritual dictatorship and not reinstated until his arrest, excommunication and execution in the spring of 1498.

Savonarola was not alone in his views toward sacred music practices in the pre-reformation church. Erasmus, in describing sacred musical practices encountered during his trips to England in 1499-1517, bemoaned the financial waste resulting from paid church musicians:

> To this end, organists are maintained at large salaries, and crowds of children spend every summer in practicing such warblings, meanwhile studying nothing of value... I ask you to consider, how many paupers dying in want, could be supported on the salaries of singers?[5]

Admission to the ranks of a sacred polyphonic choir was a privilege awarded only to the most talented singers, and was an opportunity highly prized by the early musician. Those selected often were afforded nearly the same advantage as were the local clergy. In

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 348, taken from G. Savonarola, *Prediche italiane ai Fiorentini, ed. R. Palmarocchi (Florence, 1933), III, 28 off. (Sermon of March 1, 1496).*

[5]Clement A. Miller, "Erasmus on Music," *The Musical Quarterly* LII (July, 1966), pp. 332-49.

addition to a salary that usually ranged from moderate to excellent, singers often could expect gifts of food, clothing, shoes, bed linen, and other sundry items.[6]

The background necessary to be considered for admission to a polyphonic choir could be acquired only in the formal setting of the choir boys' school. A Papal Bull of March 23, 1436 established a chorister's school to be associated with the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore for the purpose of instructing choir boys in music and grammar. With a maximum enrollment of thirty-three pupils, those selected to attend could expect a good though arduous living, and an opportunity to get an education that normally would not have been available. Boys usually were selected for their singing ability although admission also might be granted to a boy as a reward to his father for some outstanding favor accomplished for the church or clergy. Choristers were expected to perform the liturgy at nearly every service.

The popularity of the high, clear sound, particularly as heard in the falsetto, continued to grow. There is evidence that male soprano falsetti met with such approval in the church during the second half of the sixteenth century that the young choristers of the Sistine Chapel Choir gradually were replaced by adult males who had undergone the "secret" training in Spain. Boys' voices were not reinstated until two centuries later under Pius IX (1845-1878).[7]

The terms used to describe tone quality in Renaissance singers differ little from those that might be used today. A letter written in the summer of 1468 by Jachetto di Marvilla, a singer hoping to gain a new position at San Giovanni in Florence, makes mention of:

> . . . a good tenor who has a large voice, high and low, sweet and sufficient; and three very high treble singers with good, full, and suave voices.[8]

In his book *Introduction to the Skill of Song* (1597), Humphrey Bathe includes some comments on voice production:

1. Practice to sunder the vowels and consonants, distinctly pronouncing them according to the manner of place.
2. Practice to have the breath long to continue, and the tongue at liberty to run.
3. Practice in striking (time keeping) to keep a just proportion of one stroke to another.

[6]D'Accone, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-35.

[7]Clement A. Harris, "Church Choirs in History," *Music and Letters* XVII (July 1936), p. 213.

[8]D'Accone, *op. cit.*, p. 324, as taken from B. Becherini, "Relazioni de musica fiamminghi con la Corte dei Medici, nuovo documenti," *La Rinascita* IV (1941), pp. 98 ff.

4. Practice to have your voice clear.

The admonitions indicate that a clear, natural, unforced tone with a maximum of clarity in diction was the ideal. "Subtlety certainly seems to have been preferred to power, and sweetness to brilliance."[9] Other writers of the period advise the singer not to sing too loud (John Dowland in his translation of Ornithoparcus's *Micrologus*, 1606) and to avoid "all harsh straining of their voices beyond their natural pitch" (Charles Butler in *The Principles of Musik*, 1636). Butler also states that the ideal was a smooth blend, with no parts predominating, except the "points" of imitation: " . . . to keep an equal sound (except in a point), that one voice drown not another."

Because it is based upon a subjective evaluation and factors as diverse as room acoustics, size of choir, and individual tone quality, balance is one of the most challenging problems to be confronted by the student of early performance practices. It may be described simply as an equalization of all parts to produce a unified, pleasing sound, but performers and listeners tend to perceive some parts as being more equal than others (to borrow a phrase from George Orwell).

The plainsong *cantus firmus* of a polyphonic motet, for example, is often performed with instrumental doubling, in the knowledge that it is the tune upon which the composition is based. But familiarity with the *cantus firmus* could just as well have implied a lessened emphasis for that part.

In general terms, an ideal balance may have evolved from the polarization of the *cantus firmus* motet to the nonpolarization of parts in the polyphony of the High Renaissance.

The attempt to establish a logical view of performance practice in early choral music is often thwarted by opposing viewpoints on the "*a cappella* ideal."

> The Renaissance knew only *music*, which comprised both instrumental and vocal. In this respect the Renaissance continued the Medieval tradition, which spoke of '*musica instrumentalis*,' meaning all music made by a natural instrument (voice) or by artificial instruments.[10]

Convinced that the concept of *musica instrumentalis* permits nearly any interpretation, and armed with inconsistent statistics gleaned from a multitude of early church records throughout Western Europe, the present-day conductor may feel prepared to slay the instrumentation dragon by using any combination of voices and

[9]Peter LeHuray, *Music of the Reformation in England, 1549-1660*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 119.

[10]Manfred F. Bukofzer, "On the Performance of Renaissance Music," *Proceedings of the MTNA*, (Series 36, 1941), pp. 226-27.

instruments at his disposal. But each choir pursued a performance practice consistent with the cultural fabric of its locale. The extreme example of such localized practice is the polychoral tradition of St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, which must be compared to the lack of large instrumental and choral forces in Florence to be appreciated. Again, it is the difference in regional practices that moves Erasmus to sharply criticize the use of instruments in the English churches he visited at the turn of the fifteenth century:

> . . . We have brought into sacred edifices a certain elaborate and theatrical music, a confused interplay of diverse sounds, such as I do not believe was ever heard in Greek or Roman theatres. Straight trumpets, curved trumpets, pipes and sambucas resound everywhere, and vie with human voices . . . .[11]

A valid solution to the problem of instrumentation lies in attempting to establish the distribution of voices and instruments that a particular piece may have enjoyed. Using this technique, a Josquin motet may be approached with considerably more flexibility than a Brumel Mass. While the music of the former was known widely and performed under a large variety of circumstances, the music of the latter no doubt received fewer performances outside of Ferrara and the court of Alfonso I with which he was principally associated.[12]

It should be remembered that the "*a cappella* ideal" is a misnomer: it wrongly extends the meaning of the oldest tradition of plainchant. The practices of the Gothic and Ars Nova in which vocal performance was fortified with instruments continued throughout the Renaissance. Most scholars agree that the determining factor in choice of instrumentation ultimately should be the same today as it was in earlier times: the quality of the musical forces available to the choir director.[13]

This is the second of two articles dealing with the performance of early polyphonic music. An article on Medieval performance practice appeared in the January, 1977 issue of the AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW.

[11]Miller, "Erasmus on Music," p. 339. Taken from Erasmus, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J. Clericus (Leiden, 1703-06) VI, 731[c]-32[c].

[12]Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1959), p. 260. This book is an invaluable aid in determining the degree of distribution of specific works.

[13]Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1941), p. 196.

Choral Performances

New York — Verdi's *Requiem,* the nearest thing to a grand opera that was ever cast in the form of a Mass, goes beyond the kind of devotional chamber works that we have come to regard as Richard Westenburg's staked-out territory. But the music director of the Collegiate Chorale led a grandly dramatic performance of the Verdi at Carnegie Hall. It was a reading that looked back unabashedly at Berlioz's theatrical *Requiem,* with trumpets positioned antiphonally in Carnegie's highest boxes for the *Dies Irae.*

For a conductor who has specialized in authentically scaled Bach and other chamber-choir literature, Westenburg showed a Verdian flair that testified impressively to his range of sympathies. No less impressive was the Collegiate Choir itself, a group that Westenburg has headed since 1973. Although drastically out of balance in the way most large choirs are these days (twice as many women as men), the Chorale managed to suggest the full dynamic range of the *Requiem,* from the bone-rattling outbursts of the *Dies Irae* to the ethereal whispers of the *Libera Me.* The men attacked *Rex Tremendae* with marvelous unanimity and rhythmic bite and both sexes made the double chorus of the *Sanctus* a model of clear diction and sharp articulation.

Among the score's details that came through because of the Chorale's subtle response to the conductor's tight rein were the muted, chilling mutterings of the woodwinds in the *Dies Irae,* often blotted out in the general rumpus accompanying the Day of Judgment. Chorally, this was the most satisfying Verdi *Requiem* one has heard in a long time.

—Donal Henahan

The fifty-two-year-old Dessoff Choirs, which, despite the name, is one chorus, went through drastic reorganization last spring. A series of re-auditions of the then ninety-seven members resulted in the retention of only fifty-three. To this number were added twelve rigorously auditioned new members, and the resultant ensemble now numbers sixty-five. It is by choice, therefore, the smallest of our major amateur choruses.

In December, the trimmed-down group gave its first concert at Town Hall. The program planned and conducted by Michael Hammond offered what may have been the first performance here of Mozart's *"Trinitas" Mass* (K.167) along with the same composer's *Ave verum Corpus* and *Regina coeli* (K. 276) and two Bach motets—*Lobet den Herrn* and *Jesu, meine Freude.* The accompanying orchestra was augmented by a portable pipe organ brought in for the occasion.

The singing of the reconstituted chorus was alert, precise and efficient. The Bach counterpoint was clean and well articulated (too much so, at times, by the bass section), and the somewhat sticky sound that big choruses are apt to make was not heard.

In the Mozart works, the choral tone was generally attractive and well-balanced. In the Bach motets, however, thinness was apparent, particularly in the soprano section. Some of this might have resulted from Hammond's tendency to hurry through the Bach pieces rather nervously, as though he feared the pitch might sag or the tautness might go out of the performance if he were to relax for an instant. Because the Mozart music is easier, he did not push so hard, and both the choral tone and the interpretations of the works benefited.

The *"Trinitas" Mass,* which calls for no vocal soloists, gets through the text very quickly, indulging in significant word repetition only in the *Benedictus,* and is really quite attractive in a youthful, optimistic way.

—Allen Hughes

No one can accuse Georg Solti of being a sobersides when he brings the Chicago Symphony to town, but the three programs he conducted in Carnegie Hall were unusually austere in tone and primarily oriented toward the Classic symphonic repertory rather than the splashier Romantic literature. Perhaps Solti was trying to show New Yorkers that he and his virtuoso orchestra do not always require neon-lit scores to prove their excellence. At any rate, the concluding concert reinforced the prevailing mood of sobriety with a performance of the Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*—a large-scale work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, to be sure, but the music's lofty tone and devotional atmosphere are hardly calculated to generate the kind of frenzied response the Chicagoans generally enjoy after one of their concert-opera specialties.

In fact, the inconclusive nature of Solti's interpretation evidently caught the audience by surprise; it was extremely puzzling. During the first three movements one felt that Solti really had the measure of the work, or at least was projecting a personal view of a score that can

be taken in many different ways. The opening *Kyrie* was boldly outlined, a solemn, sonorous introduction, followed by the great sweeping rhetorical arcs of the *Gloria* and *Credo.* There was drama aplenty in the carefully judged dynamic accents, the lithe tensile motion and the finely graded tempo transitions from one section to another. Perhaps one felt little of the music's inherent rugged intensity and almost desperate fervancy, but there was character and musical sensibility.

The *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* movements, however, passed in a virtual vacuum of empty note-spinning. The *Benedictus,* for example, certainly one of the most sublime passages in all Beethoven, was taken at a jaunty swing that quite destroyed its expressiveness, despite Victor Aitay's sweetly played violin solo.

If Solti's overall interpretive perspective of the Mass seemed half-formed and ultimately unsatisfying, there could be no complaint about the technical execution, particularly from Margaret Hillis's superbly trained chorus, which sang with a precision of pitch, tone, and dynamic control that was altogether breathtaking. The orchestra, too, never made a false step—the instrumental blend was unfailingly lustrous and perfectly balanced.

As for the vocal soloists, Lucia Popp's luminous, pure, unpressured soprano was a constant joy to hear, while Gwynne Howell provided firm basso support and Yvonne Minto filled out the mezzo's lines generously. Mallory Walker's rather quavery tenor was decidedly out of place in such distinguished company.

—Peter G. Davis

Robert Fountain established himself as one of the best—perhaps the best at the time—of college choral conductors in the years he was at Oberlin College. Since then, he has been associated with other schools. Now at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he brought its Concert Choir to Alice Tully Hall for the first time.

The director has lost none of his ability to create a vocal ensemble that has a balanced tone of uniform character and sings with both refinement and spontaneity. This particular group had a soprano section whose top tones were not always steady or full, but the rest of the singers were vocally smooth.

Fountain achieved some outstanding performances in the sonorously moving *Lagrime del San Pietro* No. 3 of Lassus, Brahms's *Nachtwache I,* with its illustrative passages for the words "night wind"

and "sighing," and the sentimental *Fahr wohl* by the same composer. Ingvar Lidholm's "... *a riveder le stelle*" is a setting of a passage from Dante's *Divine Comedy,* composed in 1973. The long work, handsomely sung, begins unpromisingly with a lot of wordless nontonal singing, but it gradually builds into an imposing neo-Romantic piece of considerable beauty.

The program included among other works Ravel's *Trois Chansons,* witty and sensual by turns, and Hindemith's *Apparebit repentina dies,* in which the choir is heard with a ten-piece brass ensemble. This is one of the composer's best works of his later years, full of splendor and expressiveness, and it was superbly performed.

* * *

The University of Michigan Choir, directed by Thomas Hilbish, is a virtuoso group of forty-two singers, with assisting instrumentalists. Most of its technical skills were applied to contemporary music in a recent program at Columbia University's McMillin Theater, presented under the auspices of the Composers' Guild for Performance.

The evening ended with what was perhaps the finest of the modern pieces that were sung. This was Seymour Shifrin's *Odes of Shang* (1962). Two poems, in Ezra Pound's translation, are set in the composer's close-knit style for the chorus, accompanied by percussionists and a pianist. The dense choral harmonies against the delicate instrumental sounds worked beautifully, and if the balances weren't always precise in the performance for such an exactly conceived work, the result was still very fine.

Maurice Wright's cantata *The Fat Man* (1975) offered some genuine musical humor. Its wit lies partly in its Stravinskyan brevity and often spare writing, and its mournful final chorus manages to be both funny and touching at the same time. Rene Leibowitz's settings of Holderlin's *Empedokles* (1945) and of two poems by Blake, *The Sick Rose* and *Never Seek to Tell Thy Love* (1966), differed scarcely at all in style, despite the time lapse between creation. They are lovely *a cappella* pieces in a Bergian style, having a high emotional content.

Less interesting to this listener were Robert E. Pollock's *Theater Piece* (1969), a rather too cute setting of a whimsical E. E. Cummings poem, and David Winkler's *Frische Schatten, meine Freude* (1975), a long setting of a Picander poem so carefully worked out as to seem academically dry. The performances of all these works, all of them of considerable difficulty, sounded exemplary.

—Raymond Ericson

Madison, New Jersey — For the first time in its twenty-three-year history, the Church Music Conference held annually at Drew University on the first Saturday in May was moved to an earlier date. The reason was an unusual opportunity to hear a concert by the C.S. Kantorei of Frankfurt am Main, a group of thirty-two singers and ten brass players, while they were on tour in the United States, and to participate in workshops led by them.

Although the Kantorei leaders, Max Kohler and Alfred Bastian, were familiar with the English language, both preferred to use interpreters for the sake of clarity. One learned first off that the mystical initials "C.S." referred to the "Christlicher Sängerbund" (Christian Choir Association), an organization that has flourished throughout the Free Churches of Germany (as opposed to the State Church) for almost a century.

The members of the touring choir, along with selected members of the Christian Brass Choirs of Germany, were mostly young people chosen from among various parish choirs in the environs of Frankfurt. The parent organizations sponsor seminars and special training sessions on weekends and provide a steady supply of music, both new and old, for its members. In fact, the visiting choir was most generous in distributing copies of recent releases, which include choral works by Mendelssohn, Schütz, and Palestrina, as well as modern composers.

The well-balanced program included works for choir, brasses, and recorders in various combinations by J. L. and J. S. Bach, Pachelbel, Praetorius, Hassler, and Haussmann, and contemporary composers Jan Bender, Heinrich Ehmann, Herbert Beuerle, Johannes Petzold, and Paul Ernst Ruppel, whose canon derived from the familiar Buxtehude *Cantate Domino* served the dual purpose of decorating the program cover and providing music for the audience. The sound produced by the well-trained singers was a joy to hear — pure and controlled, with nary a vibrato — and the brasses were equally fine.

—Alfreda Hays

Cedar Rapids, Iowa — An American Te Deum is a work by which Coe College is honored and represented in a cumulative view of its first 125 years as an institution promoting "truth and moral excellence." The premiere performance in December brought the house to a standing ovation for the conductor-composer, Karel Husa, Professor at Cornell University, and the large ensemble (Coe Concert Band, Concert Choir, and Cedar Rapids Concert Chorale) that had helped make the performance possible.

In the key of the Founder's Day celebration, *An American Te Deum* begins with "Drum Ceremony," in which various percussion instruments set a mood reflective of the primal essence and natural beauty of the "Heartland" of America.

The lyrics of Part Two express the effect of this land on the pioneer spirit: "He found his tasks too interesting to be a burden. Nothing tired him out here. Evermore beautiful grew the tale. And evermore dazzlingly shone the sunlight over the fairy castle." With a text drawn in part from Henry David Thoreau, the work reaches its climax in the representation of the dream of reaching the "other world behind the world," the religious dream of the founders.

— Suzanne Wederich

Las Vegas, Nevada — The recent performance of the British composer David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus* was a musical event of some magnitude. Presented by the University of Nevada Chorus under the direction of Douglas Peterson and billed as a "world premiere," *African Sanctus* is a Mass combined with the overlay of a "trip down the Nile"— a melding of religious and ethnic cultures and rubrics. Fanshawe sets the Latin Mass against the background of African music he has taped on the scene over the years.

The result is spectacular without being gimmicky. *African Sanctus* has, with all its exotic harmonic and percussive effects, a unity and dimension that is rare in the musical culture of our time.

The *Sanctus* was something to see as well as to hear. Fanshawe presided over his tapes, occasionally played the piano, and sometimes broke into a "Bwala" dance from Uganda.

The chorus, soloists, and instrumentalists brought love as well as skill to the task. The solo work of Regina Doty and Liana Roetter was impeccable, and Jan Schmidt's piano accompaniment to the challenging score was masterful.

—A. Wilber Stevens

Report from Germany

Hamburg — Jürgen Jürgens, music director in charge of the performing groups at the University of Hamburg, did not promise too much when he announced Franz Liszt's *Missa Solennis*, which he presented as a novelty in Hamburg's St. Michael's Church. The work had never been heard in Hamburg, or, for that matter, anywhere in

Germany since the end of the Second World War. It is also known by the name "Gran Mass," for it was originally written for the dedication of the Cathedral of Gran (Esztergom), a town situated on the Danube north of Budapest. The reigning prince of Hungary had commissioned this ceremonial work in 1855 from Franz Liszt who, although he did not speak the language, liked to think of himself as Hungarian. He conducted the first performance in 1856 before the Emperor Franz Josef I, his entire court, and four thousand invited guests. The work had been created, in the words of the composer, by praying rather than composing.

These words indeed describe the character of the Gran Mass. For in this, his first major liturgical work, Liszt turns away from the virtuoso elegance of his piano works and the dramatic effects and literary program of his Symphonic Poems. He limits himself to a plain homophonic choral texture, from which the solo voices rise, and an orchestral texture, based on sparse rhythmic motifs that recur, combine with and intensify one another, although colorful orchestral effects are by no means avoided.

The choral element is intentionally kept simple. Gregorian touches, unison sections ("et homo factus est" and "Amen"), *a cappella* portions ("et in unum Dominum"), movements in the style of chorales or folk songs, syllabic diction, and, finally, two choral fugues — all speak directly to the listener. The solo voices are woven into the choral fabric, emerge in hymnic climaxes, and recede again into the choral texture. Tenor and soprano move downward together in a portrayal of the words "descendit de coelis." The alto, with the subtlest woodwind accompaniment, intones the *Benedictus*, the tenor sings in iridescent "Deum de Deo," and the quartet of solo voices sings most of the *Kyrie* as well as the quiet conclusion of the *Benedictus*.

The orchestra imbues the simple choral sound with a spectrum of timbres. Pointed rhythms accentuate large portions of the *Gloria*; brisk, march-like brass passages dominate the *Credo*; harp sound surrounds the solo quartet in the eight-part *Sanctus*; and the sudden rush of flute passages brightens the *Agnus Dei*. The work receives its characteristically stimulating quality through its changing dynamics and harmonic flow. It fluctuates between utmost degrees of loud and soft and glides through a range of colors achieved by gradual or sudden modulation. Ecstatic chiaroscuro and expressively heightened chromaticism give the work a theatrical aspect.But the clear order of its orchestral language modifies all extremes. This is an orchestral Mass that shows the way beyond the heights of Romanticism; it is a choral work that draws fresh strength from the Palestrina renaissance. These divergent elements determine its complex style — a style that Jürgens convincingly encompassed with the help of his university

choir and orchestra, his Monteverdi-Choir, and his excellent soloists Judith Beckmann (soprano), Carol Wyatt (alto), Karl Markus (tenor), and Franz Grundheber (bass).

The performance may be described as a revealing new encounter with Liszt's church music. And, as always in discoveries, luck played a decisive role. Jürgens happened to find a set of manuscript orchestral parts, apparently never printed, in the possession of a dealer. Eulenburg has published a piano-vocal score; and both Eulenburg and Editio Musica (Budapest) have issued study scores. Yet this does not solve all problems with regard to the availability of performance material. The uncharted spot on the musical map has assumed only a measure of definition.

—Rudolf Maack

Recent Records

GREGORIAN CHANT; *Vespers of the Holy Trinity; Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.* Choir of the Monks of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes Abbey, Dom Jean Claire. London OS 26431 stereo.

A GUIDE TO GREGORIAN CHANT. Including a Dictionary of Chant Terminology. Schola Antiqua, R. John Blackley. Vanguard VSD 71217 stereo.

As a long-time lover of Gregorian chant, and some-time performer of small portions of it, I found these two discs curiously distressing, if for different reasons.

The monks at Solesmes were the rescuers of Gregorian chant from near-dissolution back in the nineteenth century and they have been making records for as long as there has been electrical recording — as I remember, I heard them first on old 78 discs before the war. Many of us are familiar enough with what might be called the "Solesmes style" though, to be sure, it has changed moderately over the years. Inevitably, other Gregorian singers, monkish or no, have modelled their chant on Solesmes, which has become the standard norm for unaccompanied singing of the music.

I seem to be alone, then, in finding this latest London disc uncomfortable. Why? Because of what appear to be (a) lapses in pitch and (b) unpleasantly abrupt changes of mode, without pauses. Though I can't prove it, I strongly suspect that this is not innate in the performances but rather due to badly-informed tape editing.

The rationale is easy. There is continuity here, as of a larger service, rather than short excerpts. Yet an exact "live" service is not workable on discs, not only because of length but due to the inevitably long pauses, entirely natural in the living performance (and partly due to visible complications). A "boiling down" of the material is certain to be required, and that, of course, is done by editing. (If the service was, so to speak, staged for recording, there may have also been numerous alternative takes — the normal recording procedure.)

All I can say is that either the monks did these works as you hear them here, abrupt changes and all — or, far more likely, the tape editor had injudiciously put together segments that were not

originally so joined. Unaccompanied music, remember, is always "floating" in pitch, and rightly so. Editing of such music (as who should know but myself, who has often had to do it) must be accomplished with extreme attention to pitch and sequence if a legitimate final musical effect is desired! It *can* be done — just as can the blue-penciling of a written article. Matter of taste, judgment, and skill. It wasn't done right here. Beware of zealous tape editor! (But respect the good man — if, indeed, you can tell when he has done his tape editing. You shouldn't be able to.)

As for the *Guide to Gregorian Chant*, this production, out of England, has me baffled. The Guide is supposed to demonstrate three different traditions of Gregorian performance: the proportional, equalist, and metrical approaches. Yes, I hear the differences, more or less. But what struck me far more forcibly is that all of this singing, whatever the "system," is so astonishingly unlike any Gregorian I have ever heard (and particularly unlike Solesmes) that I was musically at sea and thoroughly bewildered. Very operatic, highly dramatic, opera-like. Strange, intense voice productions, rising climaxes, almost panting with excitement — heavens! Most of us had thought Gregorian the very epitome of musical restraint, on the highest level of contemplation, etc., etc. Could Solesmes be wrong?? After all, theirs is a *restoration* of a lost tradition, though surely done with care and extensive scholarship. There are no audible records of actual Gregorian, as it once was sung, only inferences, implications, indirect accountings. Could be!

For any choral conductor who finds inspiration in this chant — there are plenty of us — this recording will be a most interesting experience, even if it raises many more questions than it answers.

MUSIC AT MAGDALEN: JOHN STAINER. Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford, Dr. Bernard Rose. Argo ZRG 811 stereo.

Those of us in the older generations may remember that common phrase of disrepute, "Barnby, Dykes and Stainer!" — referring to three of the most stalwart church composers of the last century. It was the fashion to deride all things Victorian. And only now is that fashion seriously changing. Meanwhile, Stainer in particular has never lost his grip upon church music, in England and in America, via the million-performance *Crucifixion* and such gentle Sunday pastorals as *Lead Kindly Light*.

Listening here, I am afraid I must still agree with my boyhood feelings about this music, however useful and expertly written it is. For plenty of ears, especially those now tuned to Bach and other Baroque composers, and to Handel beyond *Messiah*, Stainer is the acme of watered-down Victorian propriety. It is such pale stuff, so proper and pious, so impeccably witless, with never a ripple of gutsy feeling and nothing ever to disturb the Sunday sanctity! If, of course, this is the music that you *want*, then a more perfect set of (British) performances than these you will not find. Complete with heavenly boy soprano. Highly recommended.

STRAVINSKY: *Symphony of Psalms* (1929); *Canticum Sacrum* (1958). Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, Simon Preston. Argo ZRG 799 stereo.

Add this to make a quartet of imports. I continue to think that this English choir, in its most recent phase under the direction of Simon Preston, is the finest of all its kind (and now easily ahead of the better known King's College Choir at Cambridge). The most unusual aspect of its work is the excursion into all sorts of unwonted choral territory outside the strictly British tradition of which it is an age-old part. Stravinsky in particular is superbly done — and a lot more effectively than under the old Master himself, who really didn't have much of a choral sense.

What hit me, listening here, is the utterly easy fashion in which the now old-fashioned music sails along, both for the singers and the listener. I bought the first recording of this piece, a 78 job done in France, when I was just learning music — it was made around 1933 with Stravinsky conducting. Good performance — but strained; this was *modern* music! One could sense all sorts of unaccustomed problems for the singers of that time, who were surely taken aback by the leaping intervals, dissonance, polychords, and jazzy rhythms. Hard to believe, today. The work is now one of the easiest of modern choral pieces even for rank 1970 amateurs and this highly pro choir propels it along with all the assurance of a Handelian chorus.

Really modern Stravinsky, equally well sung, appears in the much later *Canticum*, a tricky and complex piece, more purely dissonant, full of serial implications. No problems for these performers. But I wouldn't be so sure for the amateur. Might need a few dozen extra rehearsals.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE (New York). Cathedral Choir, Boys' Choir, Richard Westenburg. Vanguard VSD 71212 SQ/stereo.

Don't tell me you can't spot regional characteristics in choral singing — on records, that is. Here is the ancient Anglican tradition in its American form, put forth inside the largest cathedral in the world, larger than any in England. And the sound is pure New York. What else? Brilliant, expert, on the hard side.

New York is the land of the pro and any chorus master or choir master who knows his own best interest gets into trained singers just as soon as he can — which means, in New York, big voices that can sing anything and do it with steely gusto. Though Mr. Westenburg leads the Collegiate Chorale, he deals regularly with professional singers through his Musica Sacra of New York and the Cathedral Choir heard in this condensed midnight Christmas celebration. It has the expected big voices, so-so blend and very strong sonic projection, and is perhaps ideal for the unusual location — enormous space with a die-away time for the sound of something like *eight* seconds. It takes power to fight that sort of echo. The pro Choir is nicely balanced by the small voices of the traditional Boys' Choir and the vast reaches of the stone interior are expertly used for spatial contrasts including the expected processions.

This is one instance where recording can outperform the live performance itself. Singers in the main space of St. John's (the chapels are something else again) are lost and out of touch with the acoustics; the reverberation is so strange that for the first instant one seems to be singing outdoors in an empty field — but this is followed by the return of a whole phrase of music at a time, neatly delayed. Continuous singing is relentlessly accompanied by what has already been sung, often four or five harmonies superimposed! A very odd experience, and the audience in the flesh, unless close to the singers, hears mostly a mish-mash of polymusic, blurred to an impressive sort of non-sense. Interesting, even awesome, but musically not very informative.

On the other hand, the recording microphones can be skillfully placed — and are here — so as to minimize the long reverberation time and thus place the music in an optimum acoustic. The result on disc is available to *all* listeners, not merely those up close. The Vanguard recording is in SQ quadraphonic, which means that on any four-channel system the vast spaces will in part surround you and the processionals will move in several dimensions, more or less. This adds immediacy without compounding confusion.

SCHOLA CANTORUM DE CARACAS. *Antologia del Madrigal Venezolano*. Fundacion Mito Juan Pro-Musica, Vol. 7 (2 discs stereo).

Madrigals these are not — in any sense we ordinarily know. Not even Gilbert & Sullivan-type. Though the title sounds very scholarly and classical, what we have here is an enthusiastic neo-folk chorus, doing sophisticated choral arrangements, unaccompanied, of a large brace of "folk" melodies, the quotes intentional. I suppose they *are* folk songs technically speaking, but the "folk" themselves would not recognize them easily in their super-choral guise. Curious — this is the sort of music we get regularly from the countries of the East of Europe, led by Russia. There is the same high intensity and the same disciplined, professional enthusiasm we find in the European recordings. An interesting cultural transplant to South America.

—Edward Tatnall Canby

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