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The Fusion of National Choral Idioms in the Renaissance

by DENNIS K. COX

When one surveys a broad, representative segment of sacred choral music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, two striking features immediately become apparent: the permeation of an Italianate style and a counter-influence of styles from countries north of the Alps.

The evolution of significant new trends in Italian fifteenth- and sixteenth-century choral music has been the subject of much research. It is important to note, however, that it was not the Italian composers who took the lead in proliferating decisive new tendencies.

> Foreign composers, *oltremontani,* dominated the musical life of the Italian courts throughout the fifteenth century and during the first part of the sixteenth century (e.g., Obrecht, Josquin, de Lannoy, Brumel, Ghiselin, Isaac, et al.). The music of the courtly poet-musicians must have been a revelation to the northern composers of the fifteenth century coming to Italy for the first time, for almost nothing in their own training within the Franco-Netherlandish tradition would have prepared them for these formulaic chord patterns, clearly declaimed texts, and "fioriture." These two cultures — improvisatory southern song and refined northern polyphony — existed side by side in Italy throughout the fifteenth century.[1]

The juxtaposition of northern and southern stylistic elements ultimately resulted in a fusion, and many of the foreign composers residing in Italy returned to their homelands, carrying with them new ideas that proved influential to later generations.

A form that exerted a very strong influence upon foreign composers studying in Italy during the fifteenth century was the Italian *frottola,* whose style "differs markedly from that of Franco-Netherlandish polyphony of the late fifteenth century, above all in its use of patterned rhythms.[2] These

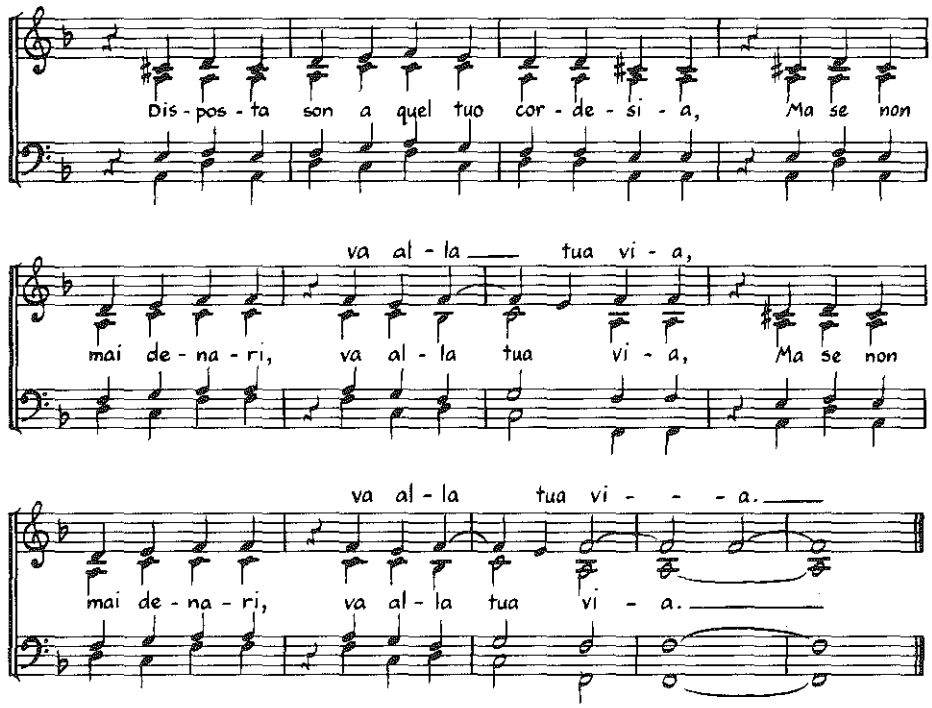
[1]Howard M. Brown, *Music in the Renaissance* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 93.

[2]*Ibid.,* p. 104.

patterned rhythms went hand in hand with syllabic text setting and strict homophonic treatment (Example 1).

EXAMPLE 1

Constanzo Festa, *Quando ritrova*



One can observe these style characteristics in many of the choral compositions of Franco-Flemish composers who had come under the Italian influence. In his study "From Okeghem to Palestrina," Caldwell Titcomb comments about this phenomenon in relation to Obrecht whose work "betrays the influence of Italian secular music (the *frottola*) and Netherlandish folk music."[3]

Two factors are of significance here. Aside from this absorption of Italian elements in Franco-Netherlandish music, there is a general effect on the compositional styles of foreign composers in both sacred as well as secular choral music. It was left for a composer of the next generation, Josquin, finally to weld the two traditions "into an exemplary universal style."[4] A permanent change of direction resulted by which subsequent composers were profoundly affected. Josquin's influence both as a composer

[3]In *Choral Music*, Arthur Jacobs, ed. (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1963), p. 35.

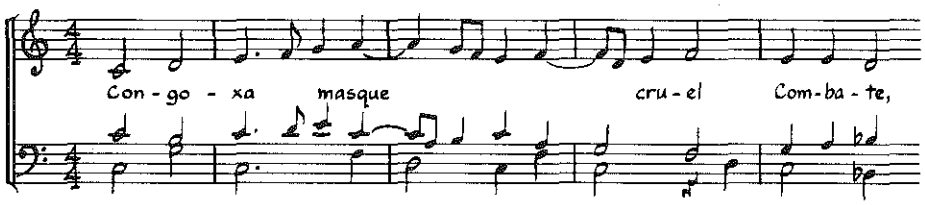
[4]*Ibid.*, p. 36.

and outstanding teacher of the second generation Franco-Flemish School was to have widespread impact.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, the musical leadership clearly passed from Franco-Flemish Europe to Italy. Many northern musicians continued to emigrate and work in Italy, but a host of native Italian composers began to attain equal prominence. On the other hand, foreign composers working in Italy were not confined to the Franco-Flemish School. Juan del Encina (1469–*c.* 1530), a prominent composer of the period, made four trips to Rome between 1500 and 1518 and took important impressions back to Spain. The influence of the Italian *frottola* style can be seen in Spanish secular choral music in the form of the *villancico* with its harmonic patterns and chord progressions (Example 2).

EXAMPLE 2

Juan del Encina, *Congoxa mas*



Easily apparent is the treble-dominated texture and the syllabic orientation of text setting; in short, the Spanish equivalent of the Italian *frottola.*

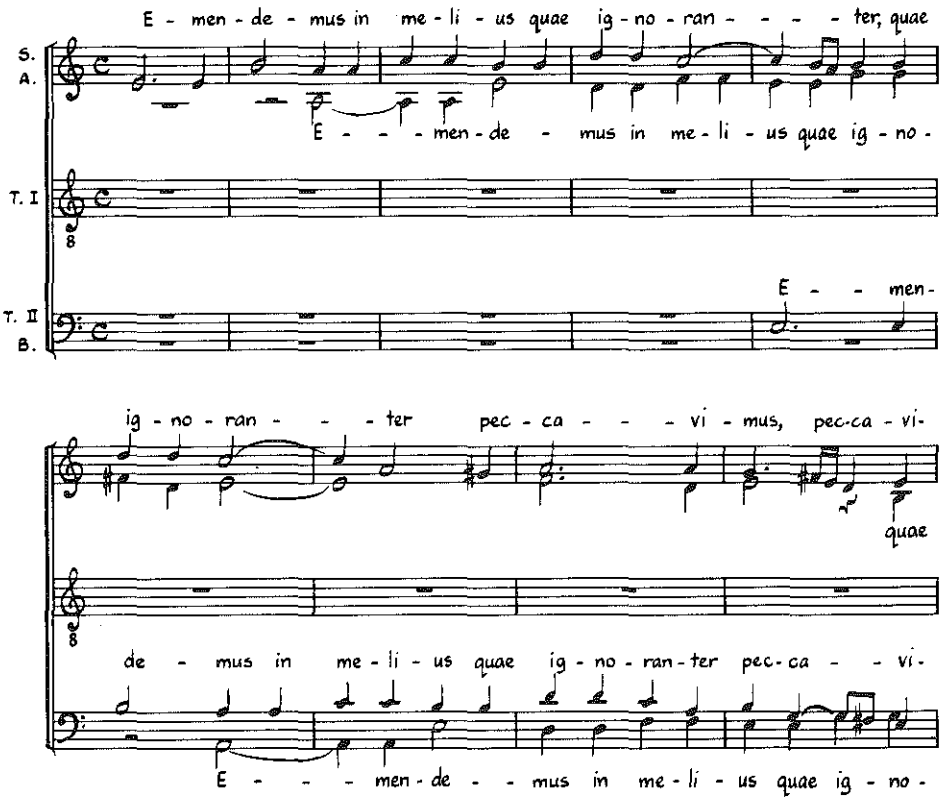
Two other Spanish masters were especially influential in perpetuating the Italian style: Cristóbal de Morales, whose works strongly affected both the secular and sacred Spanish repertory, and Tomás Luis de Victoria — the Spanish Palestrina — who composed only sacred music.

While Victoria exemplified the Roman approach with a distinctly "romantic" Spanish hue, it was Morales who may be considered the true cosmopolitan composer of sixteenth-century Spain. At home in various idioms, he nevertheless presents in his motets and secular works a certain uniquely Spanish introspective quality. *Emendemus in melius* ("Let us make amends"), one of his best known motets, is based on a response for the Ash Wednesday service. A fifth voice, interwoven into the opening four-part exposition and proclaiming the text "Remember, man, that thou art dust," adds a "mystical and penitential note"[5] (Example 3). The emotional aspects of *Emendemus in melius* are rooted especially in the dissonances that underscore significant elements of pathos contained in the text words such as "sin," "death," and "mercy."

[5]Homer Ulrich, *A Survey of Choral Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), p. 39.

EXAMPLE 3

Cristóbal de Morales, *Emendemus in melius*

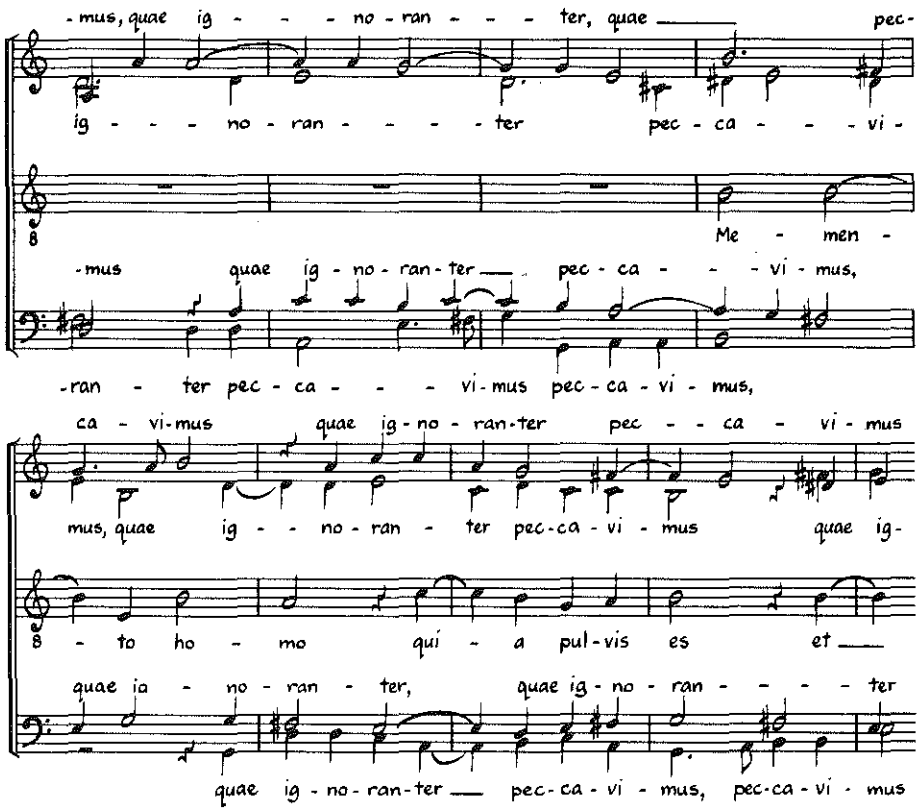


The effect that Italian secular music exerted in England is well documented. The conservatism prevalent in English compositions of the period blended with the impetus received from the Continent to produce a golden era of English music. The Italian madrigals contained in *Musica Transalpina,* the famous collection published in England in 1588, were largely from the so-called second madrigal period, representing a most mature phase of Italian art. The import of Italian ideas, however, was not accepted without criticism: Thomas Morley states in his *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597):

> . . . such be the newfangled opinions of our countrymen who will highly esteem whatsoever cometh from beyond the seas and specially from Italy, be it never so simple, condemning that which is done at home though it be never so excellent.[6]

[6]See Elwyn A. Wienandt in *Opinions on Church Music* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1974), pp. 15–16.

EXAMPLE 3 (continued)



The prolific spread of Italian forms, techniques, and ideas was due also to the tireless efforts of migrating Italian composers such as Alfonso Ferrabosco.

> . . . "Master Alfonso" built up a great reputation as a madrigalist in England and did much to interest Elizabethan musicians in Italian music.[7]

Second only to Rome in cultural importance, Venice, a center of trade and political power, represented a musical style that had an unequalled influence on the music of the Baroque era. The brilliant colors, concertato effects, and evolving tendencies of tonality characteristic of the polychoral idiom affected all of European musical art through composers coming from abroad to receive their training in Venice.

Hans Leo Hassler, who went to Venice in 1584 to study with Andrea Gabrieli, was the first major German composer to go to Italy and he became a predominant figure in transporting the polychoral style to Germany. Of

[7]Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance,* Rev. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), p. 821.

even greater significance was Heinrich Schütz, greatest student of Giovanni Gabrieli and Monteverdi and mentor of a host of German seventeenth-century composers during an active career that lasted almost into the era of Bach and Handel.

What was to become an acknowledged concept in the music of the Baroque — namely, an international command of musical styles — had undergone a long preparation in Renaissance music. It reached its fulfillment in the work of one Renaissance master, whose name must be singled out at the conclusion of our brief summary: Orlandus Lassus. In his more than two thousand compositions he united all existing styles and, wielding immense diversity, created a cosmopolitan *oeuvre* that is unmatched as an artistic synthesis.

Choral Conductors Forum

More on Authenticity

*The Questions of Authenticity presented in the Choral Conductors Forum of last year's October issue (*American Choral Review, *Vol. XXVIII, No. 4) have met with considerable response. It is of special interest that Frederick Neumann, who in his numerous writings has provided authoritative source study invaluable for the modern interpretation of early music, has also become one of its most articulate critics. He is, in fact, "the fearless specialist" called for in a recent* New York Times *editorial in which Donal Henahan addressed one of the most intricate problems of performance practice: vocal vibrato. Henahan presents the arguments for and against vibrato in both vocal and instrumental performance of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music and explains that the issue takes on different meaning in different contexts. The strongly vibrating tone of a Casals or Beecham performance may deserve as much defense as the "white" vocal sound of the most austere Baroque interpretation. But where is the historical evidence — what, again, is "authentic"?*

Two hitherto unnoticed quotations documenting the early use of vocal vibrato — one from the beginning of the Baroque period and the other from the dawn of the Classic era — form the basis of Neumann's new study in which he reviews the modern scene to which such evidence may be applied. The fact that the two essays happened to be written at the same time offers the welcome opportunity to present them here side by side. Both are polemic in tone but both are decidedly objective in opening vew vistas — which is the ideal purpose of polemics. Both, finally, agree on the validity of the criteria of personal taste and artistic communion, the cornerstones of musical performance in any era.

— A.M.

WHEN VIBRATO IS ON SHAKY GROUND

by DONAL HENAHAN

That was a fascinating story in this newspaper the other day about the retarded child who, without musical training, could sit down at a piano, reproduce a melody and immediately improvise four-part harmony to it. Such "idiots savant," as the French call these mysteriously gifted persons, turn up in music now and then, to the astonishment of us all. However, if there is a case in the psychological annals of an idiot-savant *writer,* I have missed it. Such a biological sport would be able to sit down at a word processor and say what he had to say so clearly and unequivocally that the literary world would fall dumb in amazement. Instead, we know of plenty of writers who are either idiots or savants, but none who came into the world full-blown, with idiocy and savvy in perfect equilibrium.

With this preamble, I may mention without shame a letter I recently received from a conductor who radically misinterpreted what I wrote about a pair of New York Philharmonic performances. An idiot savant with a specialty in expository writing would never let such things happen, of course. "From those two reviews," the conductor complained, "I got the impression that you felt Baroque music should be played with a 'white' vibratoless tone. Allow me to take the liberty of referring you to Robert Donington's article on instrumental vibrato in *The Interpretation of Early Music* (Faber, 1963)."

This wounds. I have been on the Donington side of the aisle for many years on the vibrato issue and am happy there. Rereading what I wrote, I think I can understand the conductor's perplexity. However, at the time I imagined this to be a clear statement of fact: "The program opened with a repetition of last week's Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in which Paul Neubauer and Leonard Davis took the viola parts. As before, it was an unstylish compromise, with modern instruments using heavy vibrato competing unfairly against two gentle-voiced, largely inaudible gambas."

That is anything but an argument in favor of "white," vibratoless tone in Baroque music. Colorless tone production in early music never made sense to me, although one regularly heard it from specialist ensembles a generation ago. I was simply pointing out a lack of stylistic consistency in the performances. In fact, heavy and continual vibrato of the sort favored by modern symphony orchestras can on rare occasions work in Baroque music (listen to a Casals playing Bach or a Beecham conducting Handel). So can the light, intermittently applied vibrato favored by most Baroque groups nowadays. What is difficult to rationalize, however, is the indiscriminate mixture of instruments, performance practices and playing techniques, to no discernible purpose. Sticking a harpsichord or a viola da gamba in the

middle of an otherwise traditional symphonic ensemble only calls attention to the stylistic problem; it cannot go far toward solving it.

Contrasting styles of vibrato, while less obvious than other stylistic differences, can be dramatically potent in their own way. Recently, I picked up Christopher Hogwood's new Oiseau-Lyre recording of Handel's *Athalia,* attracted by just such a possibility. This is one of those Academy of Ancient Music recordings that employ authentic instruments and a choir made up, in good Baroque tradition, entirely of boys and men. *Athalia,* which was Handel's third English oratorio and his first really successful effort in the genre, finds Joan Sutherland in the title role, singing in her usual richly vibrant, nineteenth-century fashion. In her final aria, she is even willing to let her voice take on a harsh Verdian bite for the word "barbarous." Opposite Miss Sutherland's is a totally different voice, that of the British early-music specialist Emma Kirkby, her style cool and her vibrato barely detectable.

In theory, perhaps, such a confusion of historical styles should not work, but here it serves to underline important dramatic points. Athalia's darkly villainous tones stand out sharply against the sweetly pure voices of her opponents: Josabeth (Miss Kirkby), her husband Joad (the countertenor James Bowman) and King Joas (the boy soprano Aled Jones).

Vocal vibrato, however, is a separate morass, a swamp of argument into which only the fearless specialist dares to venture very far. There are at least four or five types of vocal vibrato, for instance, only one of them (laryngeal) generally considered acceptable in classical, unamplified singing. String vibrato, which historically may be considered an imitation of vocal vibrato, is only somewhat less controversial, but there are some concepts that practicing musicians and musicologists can agree upon. In the Baroque period, most evidence is that string vibrato was employed much less obviously than in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mr. Donington in his *Boroque Music: Style and Performance* published here by Norton in 1982, neatly summarizes his latest thoughts on the matter: "Vibrato as an ornament in Baroque music should be massive enough to draw attention to itself, but only occurs on certain notes selected for reasons of expression. Vibrato as tone-coloring should be light enough not to draw attention to itself, but may occur freely. It is not authentic to exclude vibrato from Baroque music. It is not appropriate to introduce it continuously." Mr. Donington contents that Baroque vibrato differs from Romantic vibrato in being "less intense, less sustained, less insistent in every way, but certainly not in being altogether absent."

On vocal cords or strings, personal taste has always been the trembler's truest guide. However, performing styles do tend to run parallel with changing ways of composing. In periods when highly complex contrapuntal music was in favor, heavy, persistent vibrato would have robbed notes of

pitch focus and confused harmonies. But changing tastes in listening and in the *Zeitgeist* may have an effect as well. In our own emotionally anguished century, most of the great string virtuosos such as Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman and Pablo Casals have laid on vibrato heavily and continually, with the result that the tone has been beautified but the earlier subtle distinction between expressiveness and color has faded. The aim of string players in the modern symphony is to produce a continuously warm tone, the sort of sound that concertgoers may sit back and bathe in, whatever the historical style or emotional sense of the music. The non-vibrato, deliberately colorless tone adopted by specialists when the early-music revival was getting under way in this century may simply have been an overreaction to the prevailing orchestral sound.

AUTHENTICITY AND THE VOCAL VIBRATO

by FREDERICK NEUMANN

The performance of "early music" by organizations exclusively devoted to this specialty has in the last decades more and more assumed the nature of a cultist ritual. Under the banner of authenticity members of the cult present us with performances that are occasionally boring and dull because their aim is not, or at least not primarily, to give aesthetic pleasure, to elate and enchant, but to demonstrate, educate, and provide spiritual purification. For the audience it is an ascetic exercise in moral uplift comparable to the dutiful absorption of a long, uninspiring sermon.

"Authenticity" has become a powerful slogan and, provided we can explain it as the idea of restoring old music to the spirit in which it was conceived, its aim is noble. Unfortunately the aim defies realization. What does authenticity mean in actual practice? It would seem to involve the matching of an historical model. But which model and how can we match it? A composer's solo performance? A performance directed by the composer? Any contemporary performance even without the composer's participation? The composer's mental concept? Whatever alternative or combination of alternatives we choose, the lacunae in our knowledge are so great that any attempt at reconstruction has to rely heavily on guesswork. For this reason many scholars and musicians have taken a dim view of authenticity. In a discussion on "the limits of authenticity" in *Early Music* of February 1984, all three participants: Nicholas Temperley, Richard Taruskin, and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, with various degrees of forcefulness rejected the notion of authenticity. More surprisingly still, Nicolaus Harnoncourt, one of the leading prophets and practitioners of historically oriented performance, joined the ranks of the skeptics and declared that authenticity "does not exist" and is indeed a "swindle."[1]

In view of such formidable objections, how do the advocates of authenticity proceed in trying to justify their far-reaching claims? First, the use of historical instruments becomes the *sine qua non* of any performance. This stricture, however, does not lead far towards the presumable goal: a work may be rendered in the historically purest tone color, yet in a wretched account of the composition so far as expression, tempo, dynamics, articulation, phrasing, ornamentation, rhythms and, yes, vibrato are concerned; we are easily deceived about the shortcomings of such a performance because the old instruments may play tricks on our consciousness. Their archaic sound may conjure up an aura of historicity that hypnotizes us into

[1]Congress Report: *Bericht über das Bachfest-Symposium,* Marburg, 1978, p. 187.

believing we are privy to the revelation of the true, original spirit of a composition, when in fact we might be witnessing a musical travesty.

Putting tone color at the top of their list means, in fact, getting the priorities mixed up. In pre-1800 music the importance of tone color may range from fairly substantive in, say, Mozart, to fairly indifferent in, say, Bach. It never was the dominant factor but always subordinate to other elements of interpretation in re-creating the spirit of a work. Modern strings and winds do not injure a Mozart opera, but wrong tempi, expressions, ornaments do. What matters to Bach is line, not color. Had he been concerned about color, he would have prescribed the registrations for his organ works, yet he never did; and he would not have transcribed so casually from any medium to just about any other medium.

Next on the priority list is the number of performers, of which we are often informed through documents, such as pay records. The numbers can be significant when they were the free artistic choice of the composer. This, however, was rarely the case. Mostly composers had to be satisfied with what the circumstances offered. Mozart was enchanted when for once he had a large orchestra at his disposal. In a letter to his father of April 11, 1781, he writes: "I recently forgot to tell you that my symphony went magnificently and had great success — forty violins played — the woodwinds all doubled — ten violas — ten basses — eight violoncelli, and six bassoons . . . ." It would seem that there is no need to miniaturize his orchestras; there is only a need to balance them.

We have no reason to assume that Bach was averse to having more than twelve singers for his chorus (or no more than four, if we accept Joshua Rifkin's arguments). The historically correct numbers, even more so than the historically correct instruments, have a very limited value in ensuring the proper spirit of a work — provided the numbers used are within reason and balance the orchestra.

Aside from instruments and numbers, the other, previously listed and far more important elements of performance confront us with lacunae in our knowledge in all degrees of magnitude. The attempt to fill these usually results in turning to the canon of rules that modern research has established for historical performances. Unfortunately, many of the research procedures involved are defective; as a consequence some of the proclaimed principles are questionable, others provably false. It is by following such faulty leads that "authentic" performances often disfigure the music they claim to restore.

In previous studies I have tried to show that the principal rules of "authentic" performance are partly in need of revision, partly in need of repeal. I refer to such issues as ornament rendition, *notes inégales,* rhythmic contraction, and synchronization. Here I shall discuss another of the tenets

of authenticity, one that often contributes to the dullness of performances: the ban on the vocal vibrato, which usually goes hand in hand with an analogous ban, or at least a restriction, of the string vibrato.

Vibrato is a complex phenomenon. It consists of fast, regular oscillations of either pitch or loudness, or of their combination. These oscillations have a critical speed, a threshold, of approximately seven pulsations per second, above which they — heretofore clearly, and often unpleasantly, audible — fuse into the sensation of a richer sound while the perception of the oscillations is minimized or disappears altogether. This phenomenon, called "sonance," is comparable to the way the rainbow colors on a rotating disc turn white at a certain speed, or else to the stereophonic merger of slightly different sound impressions into a single one with added depth. Where intensity pulsation is present, there is often a concomitant oscillation of timbre. Such is always the case with strings whenever the horizontal shaking motion producing pitch fluctuations is attended by a vertical up-and-down movement of the finger that produces both intensity and timbre fluctuations. It is the specific combination of these elements, together with the speed and range of the pulsations, that in each case makes for the individual character and highly personal nature of an artist's vibrato.

Applied to strings, the vibrato mechanism is visible and therefore better understood, whereas the mechanism of the vocal vibrato is hidden and more mysterious. Here, the aural deception inherent in the phenomenon of "sonance" has deluded many early theorists into believing that the oscillations are strictly intensity fluctuations like those of the *tremulant* stop on the organ. Yet as revealed by electronic sound analysis, the intensity fluctuations are practically always supplemented by oscillations of pitch and often of timbre as well.[2] The ability of the vibrato to enliven and enrich the musical sound has been known throughout the ages, and vibrato has quite certainly been used on instruments in imitation of the voice.

Vocal vibrato must be ageless because it develops spontaneously in most mature and in all artistically trained voices. For such a voice to sing non-vibrato involves a special effort and means fighting nature. Often the effort is unsuccessful, especially in some aging voices where the weakening of the involved musculature produces a "tremolo," the obtrusively audible wavering of the voice.

The ban on vocal vibrato seems to have two roots. One is the generally vibratoless nature of boys' voices; the other, the seeming silence of old treatises on the vibrato as part of vocal tone production. As such, it was simply there, taken for granted as a fact of life, not anything artificially

[2]The pitch fluctuations are often surprisingly large. In electronic analyses of Caruso records it was found that in moments of great intensity the fluctuations reached the width of a whole tone! On strings they hardly ever exceed a quarter tone.

induced like the string vibrato and therefore not calling for special theoretical attention. Matters were different with certain vibrato-related devices that were willfully and artfully produced for the sake of specific effects. Among them was the seventeenth-century ornament called *trillo,* a fast tone repetition that could have both staccato and legato character and was one of Monteverdi's favorite devices; others were the very deliberate and fairly slow intensity fluctuations, often done in an exact rhythm. They were known in Italy, France, and Germany, and were given various names such as *tremolo* in Italy, *Schwärmer* in Germany, or *balancement,* in France.[3]

Two important documents — from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively — attest to the fact that unimpeachable authorities considered the vibrato a natural component of the human voice and a requisite for artistic singing. In 1619 Praetorius devotes a chapter of his great theoretical work *Syntagma Musicum* to the way boys ought to be instructed in the Italian manner of singing. They have to have, he says, a good voice to begin with, and as one of three requisites he lists the possession of a vibrato. "These are the requisites: that a singer possess a beautiful, lovely, trembling and wavering voice . . . ."[4] Praetorius anticipates this statement when he criticizes singers who, "gifted by God and nature with a singularly lovely trembling, and fluctuating or wavering voice," indulge in excesses of embellishments that obscure the text.[5] His remarks are all the more significant since they are made in the context of instructions for boys and would apply with greater force to adult singers.

The other witness is Mozart. In a letter to his father from Paris of June 12, 1778, he writes:

> . . . Meissner, as you know, has the bad habit of purposefully pulsating the voice, marking on a long-held note all the quarters and sometimes even the eighths — and that manner of his I have never been able to tolerate. It is truly abominable and such singing runs counter to nature. The human voice vibrates by itself, but in a way and to a degree that is beautiful — this is the nature of the voice, and one imitates it not only on wind instruments, but also on strings, and even on the clavichord, but as soon as one carries it too far, it ceases to be beautiful, because it is unnatural.

This passage is remarkable on several counts. It confirms the presence of vibrato as being in "the nature of the voice" and it stresses its beauty, which prompted an imitation on string and wind instruments that Mozart clearly approved of; it characterizes the vibrato as a natural, spontaneous

[3]For further documentation see my *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music,* Princeton, 1978, chapter 45.

[4]*Syntagma Musicum* III (1619), facsimile reprint, Kassel, 1958, p. 231.

[5]*Ibid.,* pp. 229–230.

component of the voice, setting it apart from willful pulsating manipulations of the voice which Mozart finds objectionable when carried too far, and outright "abominable" when done in the bad taste of Meissner's rhythmic emphases. One thing emerges clearly: Mozart desired the vocal vibrato as well as its — discreet — instrumental imitation.

String vibrato was not as all-pervasive as it is today but was used selectively and with discrimination.[6] In particular the over-rich, voluptuous variety practiced by many of today's virtuosi is inappropriate for eighteenth-century music. But to ban the vibrato altogether or reduce it to an almost imperceptible minimum is due to historical misunderstanding and a musical aberration; and this applies to an even greater degree to the artificial elimination of its vocal counterpart. Such procedures dull the luster, diminish the intensity and weaken the expressiveness of any phrase that calls for warmth of sound. A performance should indeed be an act of artistic communion and not one of historical demonstration, least of all when the history that is being demonstrated is unhistorical.

[6]See the reference cited in note 3 for details about the nature and use of the string vibrato.

Choral Performances

Washington, D.C. — Handel's *Saul* is one of the first and still one of the best psychological melodramas written for the English musical stage. But besides being an acute study of paranoia written before that term had entered our everyday vocabulary, it is almost a textbook exemplar of musical storytelling. It contains some brilliant writing for solo voices, even more impressive writing for the chorus, and five substantial numbers that explore orchestration as a virtuoso art.

Saul was performed at the University of Maryland, not only as the final work in the university's Handel Festival but also as a case study for an international symposium on "Editing Baroque Music" that was held concurrently.

Compared with some of Handel's other dramatic works, *Saul* presents relatively few problems in the preparation of a performing text, but there were enough of them to fill an eleven-page essay distributed at the performance for an audience that included a high concentration of musicologists. *Saul* — and indeed the whole festival — was a significant international event, and the performance was worthy of that status.

Nobody who follows choral concerts in Washington needs to be told that the University of Maryland Chorus is one of the leading vocal ensembles of the United States. Representing the people of ancient Israel in *Saul,* the chorus had material eminently worthy of its skills, and under the direction of Paul Traver it rose superbly to Handel's challenges.

The seven solo roles were filled by young singers to whom the niceties of baroque performance (dry musicological theory a generation ago) are second nature. Two singers who have become internationally known as interpreters of this material were featured: countertenor René Jacobs as David and tenor John Aler as Jonathan. Their duets were like a summit meeting of baroque vocal style, but they were ably supported by others adept in this art, notably sopranos Lorraine Hunt and Isabelle Poulenard, tenor Patrick Romano and baritones David Evitts and Gordon Hawkins.

With Handel's extensive use of the organ (which he himself would have played in the first performances), his colorful use of such instruments as the carillon and trombones (which were unusual in baroque orchestral music) and his effective use of more standard woodwinds and percussion,

Saul is orchestrally one of his richest scores, and the Smithsonian Chamber Players had a field day with this richness. This concert was almost a textbook demonstration of how scholarly effort can enrich musical impact.

— Joseph McLellan

Philadelphia — A program presented at Holy Trinity Church by the Philadelphia Singers under the direction of Michael Korn and devoted entirely to the works of Benjamin Britten served as a welcome reminder that Britten's works are among the most challenging and rewarding of the twentieth-century choral repertoire. The opening work, *Choral Dances from Gloriana,* with its prevailing homophonic textures, proved to be a veritable study in changing moods. *Five Flower Songs, a cappella,* are modern-day madrigals with a wide range of styles. One of Britten's best-known choral works, *Rejoice in the Lamb,* is a setting of eighteenth-century poetry by Christopher Smart, verses written in a madhouse that cast a spell of compelling emotions. From the group of professionally accomplished singers, Kenneth Garner should be singled out for his highly sensitive work as tenor soloist.

The program paid tribute to two of Britten's major works: the opera *Peter Grimes,* commissioned in the 1940's by Koussevitsky, with its impressionistic choruses reflecting the mood of the sea, and the *Hymn to St. Cecilia* from the same period, another *a cappella* work. The attractive idea of planning an entire program of works by a twentieth-century master that are born of the great English choral tradition was underlined by the choice of a group of part songs to form the conclusion. The excellent soloists included Doralene Davis, Priscilla Rush, Marian Stieber, Elizabeth Walker, Andrew Zimmerman, Thomas Beveridge, and Herbert Wittges.

For a second program of twentieth-century music, the Philadelphia Singers were joined by another professional chorus, New York's Gregg Smith Singers, in an evening that offered several première performances. The ensembles alternated in presenting the first and second halves of the program but united in its conclusion — an engaging program design that featured, to some extent, choral music associated with the Philadelphia and New York scenes, respectively. Samuel Barber's *Reincarnations,* composed in 1940 on texts by the Irish poet James Stephens, are works marked by a free flow of tonality and meter, which provided an effective opening for the event. They were followed by *Trois Amours de Ronsard,* settings of sixteenth-century poems, by Thomas Beveridge, a student of Nadia Boulanger and former member of the Philadelphia Singers. Madrigal-like, subtle

in their rhythmic texture, and thoroughly idiomatic in their *a cappella* sound, these works suggested a refreshingly French palette. The first program half was rounded out by Stravinsky's *Mass* for chorus and wind instruments, completed in 1948, to whose cerebral language the richness of the voices added a welcome sense of warmth without disturbing its clarity.

An intriguing contrast was created by juxtaposition with another Mass, written in 1984. Gregg Smith's *Mass in Space* carries the polychoral principle to the point where chorus and soloists are scattered throughout the auditorium. Truly surrounded by sound, to which a piano part lent dramatic accents, the audience appreciated the challenge as well as the vocal virtuosity with which it was carried out.

William Schuman's *Perceptions,* heard for the first time in this city, served in the context of the program as a special endorsement of its central aspect: it was commissioned by a National Endowment for the Arts grant to promote the performance of new choral music. The evening's fare ended, appropriately, with an American choral classic, Charles Ives's *Three Psalms,* which were performed by the two choruses in antiphony.

— Nancy Plum

Los Angeles — The arrival in Los Angeles of John Currie, the new music director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, was heralded by a performance of Verdi's *Requiem.* It was one of the few choral debuts Los Angeles had seen in many years — in fact, there had not been a major one since Roger Wagner, founder and music director, began his reign twenty-two years ago, although Currie had gained attention here when he and the Scottish National Orchestra Chorus toured in the United States.

Verdi's *Requiem* has always been considered one of the touchstones for choral musicians. It contains nearly every expressive device that one might want to ask from a chorus — an expansive dynamic palette, a need for varieties of tone color apparent by comparing, for example, the "Sanctus" with the "Lacrymosa" or with the opening bars of the "Requiem aeternam." The work also contains magnificant fugal writing requiring yet another kind of approach.

It was apparent in this performance of the *Requiem* that Currie is following a course that varies considerably from that of his predecessor. By making many changes in the Chorale's personnel, Currie changed the total choral sound. Most apparent, surely, is a new timbre in the soprano section — a warmer and more resonant tone than Wagner favored. There seems to be a new freedom of vocal production that allows for greater vocal force without strain or threat to intonation. The other sections remain essentially

as remembered under Wagner with perhaps some loss of depth in the alto sound and, to a lesser degree, in the bass section.

The choral technique of the Chorale has always been superb and remains so under Currie's direction. Diction, dynamics, blend, intonation, and balance all appear to be achieved at a uniformly high level. Los Angeles choral audiences should expect to hear fine performances from Currie and his Chorale. It remains to be seen what will be done with the *a cappella* and smaller Baroque and Classic repertoire for which Wagner had created a special niche in his work on the choral scene.

* * *

On March 1 the Master Chorale presented an evening of Beethoven's choral music at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. The works included, in chronological order, the *Mass in C,* the *Choral Fantasia,* and *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage.*

The *Mass in C* is one of those noble works that are easily overshadowed by the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa Solemnis.* It remains one of the major symphonic Masses, and its beautiful qualities emerged to great advantage. The overall tone color was brilliant, sturdy, and fully resonant on the *forti,* yet not so heavy as to be turgid on contrapuntal writing. The solo quartet in the Mass consisted of some notable Los Angeles singers — soprano Mary Rawcliffe, mezzo-soprano Janet Smith, tenor Thomas Randle, and baritone Thomas Wilcox. Despite the excellence of the individual singers, as a quartet they proved to be oddly balanced and not always compatible in timbre and tone color. The ability of the soprano soloist to penetrate the texture of the varying demands of solo quartet, chorus, and orchestra frequently came into question. Miss Smith dominated the ensemble with respect to volume and depth, but occasionally lacked the focus, security of pitch, and vocal ability of the others. Both male members of the quartet offered firm vocal support though with little regard for using the voice in an expressive rendering of the text. The chorus performed the Mass impressively throughout with the exception of occasional lags in intensity and momentum during the "Credo," and the "et resurrexit" and "et ascendit" were not always sung with unbridled excitement or with the sense of profound awe the texts would suggest.

Some of the finest moments of the concert came during the *Choral Fantasia.* A brief study for the Choral Symphony, the *Fantasia* is related to the genre of the piano concerto rather than to the symphonic design. But it was written after the great series of piano concertos; one senses a certain message of farewell from the composer's career as a concertizing artist, and despite its intriguing blend of forms and styles, the work pales next to Beethoven's sensitive setting of Goethe's poetry in *Calm Sea and Prosperous*

Voyage. This little known work is of particular interest to the choral conductor because of the composer's manuscript additions in a revised copy, annotations that not only offer Beethoven's own metronome marking but also specific directions as to how the opening should be conducted ("the conductor's hands should be held as low as possible, except in forte passages" — "for the first measure somewhat higher" — "in the second and third relaxing again" — "in the fourth measure hardly any motion . . . suggesting utmost quiet"). Here the Chorale was in its element, providing beautiful singing as well as superb articulation, and although the performance might have benefitted from more powerful orchestral drive toward the end, the ensemble was accomplished throughout.

— Gary McKercher

Recent Records

HINDEMITH: *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd.* William Stone, Jan DeGaetani; Atlanta Symphony and Chorus, Robert Shaw. Telarc CD 80132.

This full sized neo-oratorio for two soloists, chorus and orchestra, to a text by Walt Whitman, was prompted by the sudden deaths of two of our Presidents, Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, both, curiously, at the tail end of a major war, both deaths of an impact on the American people that was searing in intensity. Those millions of us who remember the Kennedy episode, and remember the President's brother and Martin Luther King, will know what is meant by searing; but Roosevelt's death in 1945 had an even greater impact. It was a shock that was almost unbelievable, as I well remember myself, for it seemed incredibly personal to each of us, an emotional battering ram that hit each individual with devastating force. It was, we hear, the same with Lincoln, and this I can believe. The end of a terrible war leaves us unprepared for that sort of disaster.

Hindemith? — removed from his now alien homeland, he was in 1945 in his most American-minded stage, here as elsewhere in his work, already an American citizen. Robert Shaw himself commissioned this work in memory of F.D.R. only weeks after the death and it was first performed by Shaw's early Collegiate Chorale in 1946. It does not seem to be widely known, and there is but one recording in a recent comprehensive disc catalog — from Germany, an act of late attrition? Acceptable enough, of course, but I would think Robert Shaw has a more cogent reason for performance, with his present American singers and soloists: The Whitman poetry is so essentially American in its manner. In theory, at least, it should be a "natural" for the more serious repertory of any sizeable chorus in this country that has access to an orchestra and adequate soloists — baritone and soprano.

And yet — the music somehow does not measure up. It has not a tenth of the passion in the more flamboyant *War Requiem* of Benjamin Britten, to take an almost parallel example. Though I do not have the score at hand, the work does not really seem difficult once the chorus has absorbed the predictable sound of the late Hindemith idiom, compounded out of traditional elements moulded in blocky chords made of fourths — virtually every segment ending in a mellifluous major triad. There are few screechers, as

someone has called "modern" dissonant harmony, very few impossibly large jumps, all is vocally felicitous, just as Hindemith writes for every medium and instrument, be it for piano, his own viola or even a heckelphone: a big piece with a vast quantity of notes to learn, but not a forbidding proposition by any means.

Why isn't this an outstanding and famous work — a major oratorio by a major composer to a vital text, composed at a moment of extraordinary national emotion? It *should* be, all things considered.

The answer, I'd guess, is in Hindemith himself. Yes, he could write in extraordinary terms — his finest music is superb in expression as well as musical technique: *Mathis der Maler,* notably the orchestral suite or symphony, the solemn, almost acrid *Trauermusik* — memory says that it was for George V — the almost jolly and very jazzy *Metamorphoses,* a disciplined set of variations. But as he grew older and waxed successful in his new American environment, Hindemith wrote, very simply, a lot of extremely high level run-of-the-mill music, making use of his enormous skills to turn out at least one of just about everything. It was a matter of principle with him, this workshop musical engineering; he was like the composer —Saint-Saëns? — who produced music as the pear tree produces pears. (I would hate to suggest alike as peas, but that is the result!). Somehow, that supreme confidence in his productive powers dulled Hindemith's sense of musical values. He did not want to be "inspired" in the old way but, rather, to make his place as a craftsman to be judged by the excellence of his crafting. "Lilacs" is indeed a beautifully put together oratorio with all the needed elements of solo, orchestra, and choral fluency, and I expect that it is a pleasure to sing (listen to Shaw's Atlanta singers) and a satisfaction to play.

Perhaps I am wrong. If so, perforce Robert Shaw is too. His evidently large choral forces are excellent though on that scale much like many another competent aggregation. But the very thickness and complexity of the Hindemith counterpoint in the choral parts is not going to allow for much drama — this is not *Messiah!* On the other hand, neither is it portentous and heavyweight, like too many huge oratorios by recent composers.

I should add that the work is really held together by the very large part for baritone solo. William Stone scarcely rests for a moment, spelled only by lesser lengths from the excellent Jan DeGaetani. Stone is superb, a dedicated singer with flawless projection and pitch, his only "fault" being the usual convention of stilted English common in "classical" music for voice — *Oy geev yooo* for "I give you" — which is not too good for the down-to-earth beauty of Whitman's text. But, again, the long semi-recitatives are somehow just a bit longer than we want to take, no matter *how* well done. So it goes.

Note that "Lilacs" is usually listed under *Requiem,* or under the rest of its subtitle, "For Those We Love." One face of a CD holds the entire work but there is an LP version, I expect, or will be.

A Note on the Compact Disc

To the surprised gratification of the record industry, the CD, the new-style laser-played recording, has taken off like a whirlwind in spite of its very high cost — still — and the cost of the playing equipment. Though, to be sure, this last has come down to reasonable levels and you can plug the player into your old phono stereo equipment, whatever its sort.

Predictably, most musicians and artistic people tend to run down this new gadget. They shouldn't. It is, as they say, a quantum improvement on the old LP and it has some uniquely *musical* qualities that we all should know of. Faults, of course! Most are transitory, and will disappear as with the LP problems in early years.

Yes, at best the sound quality beats anything so far but this is really not the first consideration for the musician! To my mind the first three virtues are these:

First, there is available *total silence* behind the CD performance, given no extraneous sounds in the recording itself. That is, any background sound you hear must be part of the musical performance. Some is natural and indigenous — we do not usually perform in an anechoic chamber. But you will be surprised at the difference. Second, equally important, the CD pitch is *absolute* — there is *no* variation or "wow." The LP does acceptably well and we seldom notice any deviation — but the CD, again, is startling in this respect. And no "turning" record rhythm at all, one of the most disastrous aspects of the less-than-perfect LP and even of the tape audiocassette. The best test is, of course, the piano, or other fixed-pitch instrument.

Third is more indirect: *permanency,* in two ways — directly, in the record itself, where the tiny pits of the "groove" are covered with a safety layer of plastic. Unfortunately, any surface dirt or scratch does disastrous things to the optical purity and this can be serious, but correctible by simple cleaning or, for scratches, via proprietary waxes that flatten out the shapes so the laser beam is not diverted. (The scratches themselves do not "play" as in an LP.)

Indirectly, the permanency of the digital master recording is of immense importance to sonic archiving of music, because it is a *code,* like the letters of a Shakespeare soliloquoy but far more specific. If the code can be read, the entire "message" can be reproduced *exactly* as in the original, with no loss at all. Ideally speaking, at least. The nearest analogy for musicians is

the printed score, from which we hope to reconstruct, i.e., "read" the music coded therein. Since we can now make numberless copies, *all equal,* we have the potential of avoiding deterioration as we have never had it before. That in itself is vital, musically speaking.

Yes, older recordings are reappearing on CD, coded in the new digital format. They are therefore far more permanent, once transformed. But there is a mixed blessing in the "improvements" now being made. Some are magical and of the highest sophistication. Others are variably disastrous, depending on the listener. This, of course, is a matter of taste and musical understanding, as is all "classical" recording of any sort. In time the restorations will tend to settle down and even now they add up to much that is positive, in spite of commercial necessities.

The small choral record producer will find digital recording expensive and the necessary editing horrendously so. The cost will come down but for a long time the handy LP will be alive and the wiser choice. A good compromise is a digital recording, transferred to a published LP. You can always derive a CD later on, when feasible.

— Edward Tatnall Canby

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ANGEBRANNDT, BETSY JO. *It's a Glorious Day.* 2-part treble voices, piano. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (6 p., .45)

BERGER, JEAN. *Boo-Hoo at the Zoo or Tails of Woe.* 2-part voices, piano. (Three separate pieces; total performance time app. 6:30.) Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (20 p., .75)

CHAPLIN, MARIAN WOOD. *Sing It!* Arr. by Hawley Ades. 2-part voices (SA, TB, or mixed), keyboard, opt. flute (part included). Harold Flammer (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa). (8 p., .45)

COBURN, JANE. *Love Is . . .* Arr. by Hawley Ades. 2-part voices, piano, opt. guitar. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (7 p., .45)

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ELGAR, EDWARD. *From the Greek Anthology.* Five unaccompanied part-songs for TTBB, Op. 45. Novello, Borough Green, Seven Oaks, Kent. (23 p., $3.10)

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HILLIER, PAUL, ed. *English Romantic Partsongs.* Thirty pieces mostly for SATB. Oxford University Press, Oxford (England) and New York. (156 p., no price given; ISBN 0-19-343650-7)

HORNER, JAMES, et al. *Somewhere Out There.* From the motion picture *An American Tale.* Arr. by Ed Logeski. SSA, piano (Fender Rhodes piano preferred), opt. instruments (electric guitar, electric bass, percussion, and synthesizer). (Set of parts for sale.) Also for SATB, SAB, and 2-part voices. MCA Music Publishing (Hal Leonard, Milwaukee, Wis.). (7 p., .95).

HUNNICUTT, JUDY. *Wise Men Noble, Wise Men Three.* An Epiphany carol. Tune from the *Andernach Gesangbuch* (1608). SATB, organ (handbells ad lib.) G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (7 p., .50)

KELLY, BRYAN. *Watt's Cradle Song.* SATB, piano or strings (string parts and score on rental). Oxford University Press (London). (2 p., .40)

LASSUS, ORLANDUS. *Quel Rossignuol.* Text by Petrarch (Sonnet 270). Ed. by Dennis Stevens. SSATB. (English translation of the sonnet on p. 10.) Text in Latin only. Oxford University Press, Oxford (England) and New York.

MEDEMA, KEN. *A Time for Love.* SATB, accompaniment. (Pre-recorded orchestra accompaniment on a 7½ i.p.s. reel-to-reel tape for use as an alternate to keyboard available from publisher.) Arr. by Bill Pursell. Word Music (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa) (Three pieces; performance time app. 10:00.) (32 p., $1.25)

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PHILLIPS, JOHN C., arr. *O Waly Waly.* Somerset (England) folk song collected by Cecil Sharp. SSA. Roberton Publications (Theodore Presser, Bryn Mawr, Pa). (4 p., 12 pence)

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VARCOE, JONATHAN. *God is Gone Up.* Introit for Ascensiontide. SATB, organ. Text is Psalm 47, verses 5–7. Oxford University Press, Oxford (England) and New York. (4 p., no price given; ISBN 0-19-350393-X)

VICTORIA, TOMÁS LUIS DE. *Cum Beatus Ignatius.* Ed. by Denis Stevens. SSATB. (English translation of anonymous Latin text on p. 1.) Text in Latin only. Oxford University Press, Oxford (England) and New York. (12 p., $1.00)

WOLFF, S. DRUMMOND. *Crown Him With Many Crowns.* A chorale concertato for choir, congregation, 2 trumpets, organ. Tune: *Diadematа.* Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (11 p., .65; part for the two B-flat trumpets included)

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— Richard Jackson

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