

GREAT SCHOOLS OF CHORAL COMPOSITION AND INTERPRETATION IN RENAISSANCE

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Abstract. *This article is an analysis of the Renaissance music (mostly of choral music) highlighting the important contributions made by the representative figures of the Franco-Flemish and Italian (Roman and Venetian) schools, which imposed genres such as the madrigal, the chanson, the ballads, the rondeaux, and motets, virelais and magnificates.*

Keywords: *Renaissance polyphony, chanson, motet, missa, requiem, madrigal, song, psalm, hymn, Cantus firmus.*

1. THE FRANCO-FLEMISH SCHOOL

Although musicology has established a specific period of music history to be named *new art* (*Ars nova*, XIII-XIV centuries), I consider it would be more appropriate that Renaissance art should acquire this title - *new art* (or *birth* as stated above) since, through the synthesis realized by the main schools of composition and musical performance, the Renaissance created a completely original music, inspired by the fundamentals of human being, fully aware of its own concerns and feelings.

At the beginning of the Renaissance, the main centers of dissemination of the new creative methods were to be found in Flanders and Burgundy - Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg today. Along with a series of wars, in the anxious Europe, an unprecedented flowering of artistic activities took place. It was mainly in cities which, by their nature, were primarily economical centers (Amsterdam, Bruges, Brussels, Antwerp, Liege, Rotterdam) that developed an art - especially the painting belonging to masters who succeeded to let free their imagination, controlled by the most luxurious representations, unfolding in countless plans and which would echo in the polyphonic musical creation as well.

The art of vocal singing and instrumental accompaniment were in full bloom throughout Europe; although trained in religious schools, the singers performed a sustained musical activity at the royal courts, promoting a repertoire as required there. The musicians of the time – due to the quite developed means of travel - were well informed on the music performed in other cultural centers and, because of this reason, the musicians themselves became missionaries of the new culture stated in the Franco-Flemish area.

The main characteristic of this musical school, called also the Netherlands school, was that the disciples would come under a master's influence. Among the first masters recorded in history, we can mention Gilles Binchois and Guillaume Dufay. Grouped around prosperous

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cities and noblemen who were music lovers, these musicians succeeded to contribute to the recognition of genres such as: *chanson*, *ballads*, *rondeaux*, *virelais* as well as *motets* and *magnificatas*.

Maintaining themselves in the austerity of the modal structures and of some parallelisms of the faux – buordon type, Binchois and Dufay were honored in the guild's appreciation (especially Dufay who traveled beyond the borders of Flanders) as illustrious magistrates of music [1].

Of course, among other musical activities, these masters took care of the apprentices' training in the composition of rondos, ballads, virelais, polyphonic chanson. It is important to stress out that, with these creators, we can already signal the interference of the creative resources - the cult creation (which had a prevailing role) and the popular songs (which can be found in different religious compositions under the name of *L'homme arme*. The constant concern of the church to preserve and extend the tradition of the Gregorian monody in the religious genres, was often infringed by composers who, following the poignancy of their own or profane songs, introduced into the masses or motets such quotes called *L'homme arme* - after a famous folk song of the age.

The melodic and rhythmic variety of folk songs inspired creators who managed to create an integrated work and a quite balanced form. At the same time, these composers began to become interested in the contrast between the parts of an extensive work by alternating sonorousness (created by different vocal groups in dialogue with the entire choir) or by introducing different compositional techniques (such as: elements of counterpoint, imitations, contrary movements, etc.).

The polyphony initiated by the school is defined by a sober linear-vocal characteristic, with a pure melody, usually assigned to the upper voice.

The imitation technique reaches, through the Franco-Flemish school, the status of a real exercise of intelligence, a relevant example of the kind being the well-known choirs of over 20-30 voices.

The next generation of Flemish composers is represented by Johannes Ockeghem (Hainant, approx. 1410 - Tours, 1497) and Jakob Obrecht (Bergen op Zoom?, Approx. 1450 - Ferrara, 1505), beneficiaries of a solid musical education. They drew the European princely courts' attention; Ockeghem even got the title of "the most illustrious of the masters."

These composers developed the *chason*, *motet* and *misse* but it is important to take into consideration that in Ockeghem's creation there is also a *requiem*. It is still in his work that one can already feel the concern for the ancient Gregorian melodies interwoven with really inventive counterpointing techniques; it is always Ockeghem that we owe the *Deo grantias* motet, built on a combination of four canons to nine voices, creating an overlap of 36 voices.

There are certain features that can be highlighted in his creation:

- he imposes and promotes the predominant role of the imitative technique;
- the number of voices is variable in his creation (3-4, 2-36) and he treats them equally;
- the contrasting tempos are used;
- he might be the composer of the first Requiem.

Generally speaking, the genres representative for these composers are the masses, with or without the cantus firmus, without ornamentation, with a poignant melodic and rhythmic and quite often characterized by profound feelings and ideas.

It happens more with Obrecht than with Ockeghem to discover a more secular character of the song and an obvious tendency towards elaboration, through more developed themes.

It is Obrecht who imposes the gradual broadening of the vocal ambitus, the generalization of the counterpointing procedures and the reiteration of certain musical themes and motives.

These composers' intelligence makes that the interpretation of certain works' texts be realized to a higher level, using different *keys* to translate the messages, the same way it happens with the riddles, mirror reflexion (in recurrence) or the interval inversion – aspect that was not unknown to the great composer *Josquin des Pres* (1460-1521); he is the composer of *Mille Regretz* (chanson) and *Pang lingua* (missa) - a masterpiece of the genre. Former disciple of Ockeghem, Josquin des Pres traveled to Italy (Milan and Rome) and then to France (Paris) and finally returned to the Netherlands.

Thus we can distinguish three major periods in his work with relevant Italian influences that are developed within a particular technique of the counterpoint. He manages to create a new relationship between text and music - preoccupied to establish a new relationship between word and music, between melody - rhythm and harmony as well- and polyphony. The composer was very much involved in conveying the situational emotional background in the score, without inventing other genres than those already established. Josquin des Pres became a master of the counterpointing technique, asserting at the same time, the breaking of the canon when expressiveness required so.

The composer's polyphonic technique is well known - for instance, the chanson *Baisies moy ma duolce amye*, conceived in triple canon for six voices, has a very dynamic expression: major third for positive emotional states and minor third for the depressive ones. In Josquin des Pres' s creation there are songs in fashion at that time, songs which were also used in the religious creation (*L'homme arme*). The two masses (*L'homme arme*) use a *cantus firmus profane*, thus continuing Dufay's line.

Recognized as a great teacher of the time, Josquin des Pres was very interested in publishing his own creations just to make his impressive emotional work available to the other musicians.

There are certain features in the creation of this important representative of the Netherlands musical culture, which can be easily emphasized:

- elegance and clarity based on an impeccable technique;
- a rigorous melodic and rhythmic construction as well as spontaneity and innovation;
- the songs are mostly his own creation;
- he uses imitation and canon in his entire creation;
- he uses jumps and intervals that are not solved, progress in parallel thirds and cadences.

Along with these representatives of the second polyphonic school there are other important composers such as Pierre De La Rue (Ockeghem's disciple), Heinrich Isaac (vocal and instrumental music composer, present for a long time at the royal courts in Italy and Austria) or Jacob Arcadelt.

Orlando di Lasso (Roland Lass, 1532- 1594) was the one who knew all the compositional techniques; situated outside all models and time, the last of the most distinguished Netherlands musicians, exploited both the knowledge of the Franco-Flemish techniques and the unequalled experience of the Italian composers.

His departure to Italy was facilitated by Adriaan Willaert (1485-1562), composer established in Italy, Venice. Both were attracted to the tensions of double choir constructions, practiced especially by the Venetians.

In his creations of villanelles, canzons, chansons or madrigals, Orlando di Lasso begins to be attracted to the thirds' effect and, through them, to the harmonic consequences of his musical works. However, the motet is the genre to be found in his creation all along his

life, representing the most important of his works. Orlando Lasso's motet reaches the climax of the Flemish polyphony.

After the Italian periplus, Orlando di Lasso headed to Bavaria, in Munich, where he took over the chapel, competitively imposing his imperative style and innovating spirit. With a rich experience, a true *priceps musicae*, Orlando di Lasso was ennobled by the Emperor Maximilian for his contributions to the German culture prestige with the "St. Peter's Knight" title.

Author of over 2.500 works (in only 62 years) belonging to all genres practiced at the time, Orlando di Lasso reflects the deep and perpetually reformist spirit of the Renaissance, having a creation expressed in the main European languages at that time (Flemish, French, Italian, German, Latin).

Orlando di Lasso was dedicated to the secular music, asserting himself as a master of the madrigal for which he created 180 works, plus 146 French songs, 93 lieder, psalms, hymns, etc.; at the same time he dedicated himself, with an equal intensity, to the sacred music composing 53 masses, 100 magnificats, 700 motets and many other works belonging to the religious genre. He left his imprint on the personality of all genres used in his creation, giving them new dimensions; he used a special notation for the motets, gender used throughout his life and which represents the peak of his creation and the Flemish polyphony. Unquestionably, though, Orlando di Lasso is the acknowledged master of the madrigal.

In accomplishing this (the madrigal), Orlando di Lasso used a large number of themes, never hesitating to speak freely and revealing real aspects of life with a strong intensity. Towards the end of his creational activity, Orlando di Lasso develops a polyphonic style with unexpected chromatisms and harmonies, with different rhythmic overlaps and sometimes, quite surprisingly, with large areas of homophonous composition.

2. THE ITALIAN SCHOOL

From a generic perspective that Renaissance offered on the European culture, one can easily notice its parallel development with the political situation. A relevant example could be the main cities - republics of Italy which, far from having a homogeneous political life, can maintain a spiritual and artistic life of the highest quality, treasuring the national or local values as well as the creators belonging to other cultures for the quality of their artistry.

The church along with the princely courts and the main families of the cities in the peninsula (Medicis, Sforza, d'Este, Gonzaga, Malatesta) were in dispute to assert the primacy of their reputation through the high quality of the artistic act, thus increasing their reputation as Maecenas. Although the main orders came from the church, most of the time, the real creative moments were related to performances at the princely courts, within the official or private celebrations, anniversaries or other types of celebrations. During these events there was a real competition between the patrons who were daring one another in grandeur and opulence.

If we take a general look at the Italian Renaissance creation, we can divide it into three periods that overlap, without existing a strict separation between them, nevertheless, having some stylistic features that distinguish them. The use of a different number of voices, the change occurring in the relationship between text and music as well as the use of several compositional procedures, is not a "dissonance" of the whole unit.

The art of sound and the harmony between music and poetry touches the perfection in this period. The grasping of the popular melodies makes music fulfill its originality and the artistic creativity flourish without precedent. The well-known *villanelles* or *frottolas*, *canti*

carnacialeschi or *balletti* are forms that will assert the autochthonous color and temperament on the technical elements imported from Flanders, managing to replace the predominantly homophonous writing, settled on the folk song stanza architecture, with the new polyphonic style thus generated.

Great Italian musicians were equally interested in the religious and secular music, with a plus of interest for the madrigal, which will represent the perfect product both in creation and expression.

Speaking of the Italian Renaissance music, we refer not only to a school or a group of composers who activated in Rome, but also within artistic and cultural centers scattered throughout the peninsula. The influence of the Notre Dame school as well as from the Netherlands is felt throughout the area; there were many composers who promoted and popularized forms and genres cultivated by the Flemish people.

This happens with Josquin des Prés who, after passing through Milan, Rome and Ferrara, stops in Venice where he publishes his works and initiates his followers in the polyphonic art.

3. THE VENETIAN SCHOOL

The refreshment of music in the islands formed by the Adriatic lagoons was largely due to the Flemish composer Adrian WILLAERT (approx. 1490-1562) who, after imposing himself in his native country, went to Paris, then to Ferrara (1522) and Milan (1525-1527). In 1527 he established in Venice, where he was bandmaster at San Marco Cathedral, becoming the founder of the Venetian school which had an artistic activity comparable to that from Rome. He was remarkable not only due to his creation but because of his numerous and distinguished disciples, too: *Andrea Gabriel*, *Cipriano da Rore* (this one being his follower as bandmaster at San Marco), *Gioseffo Zarlino* and others.

Adrian Willaert adapted the elements inherited from the Franco-Flemish school to the Italian spirituality, both in the melodic nature of the works as well as in the genres that he approached; thanks to his collaboration with the Italian poets, he will create a music in which the colorful popular language will be fully exploited and explored by the composer.

Willaert's creations using Francesco Petrarca's lyrics, the psalms for the choir, the masses, the motets, the instrumental stuck, succeeded to make known the Franco-Flemish school in the peninsula, ensuring his successes, and all the necessary conditions to be recognized as the third great musician able to illustrate the liturgical spirit of the Catholic Church.

As Henrich Isaac, his conational, had done before with Prince Lorenzo de Medicis' lyrics – for whom he composed *canti carnacialeschi* (carnival song) - Adrian Willaert practiced the frottola (ital. Frotta - group, crowd). The genre of frottola appeared in the fourteenth century and was accepted as a national musical art; being very entertaining, lively and happy (in most of the cases) the frottola is based on texts referring to love, being presented at various carnivals, festivals, etc. In its choral form (it can appear in voice and instrumental accompaniment version), the soprano voice presents the melody and the other voices are placed at every quart and quint intervals. A very simple song of folk origin, very rhythmic and mostly sung in major – here are frottola's specific elements. In composition it is different from the Netherlands type of polyphony, but from the genre's point of view, it approaches the madrigal and the villanelle.

The frottola, in the evolution of musical forms, introduces a certain poetic pattern which consists in alternating stanzas with the refrain, generating a musical form on simple

plans and having two themes: AB or ABAA BAB; sometimes, improvisations are added; from the organizational perspective, in the frotola, the main melody belongs to the upper voice whereas the bass maintains harmony.

Adrian Willaert is considered, along with Jacques Arcadelt, Festa and Verdelot, one of the madrigal's creators, bringing together the Northern and the Italian styles.

The intermediary character between the polyphonic and harmonic-homophonic structures, contributed to the madrigal's crystallization in a choral composition, often polyphonic (initially present in a monodic form), a cappella. Considered in the fourteenth century as a primitive and unorganized genre, initially expressed by one voice only, and then by 3-4, it has a first period of flowering followed by a decay. The madrigal's revival takes place in the XVIth century, becoming one of the best forms of chamber music, due basically to its flexible form, the secular themes approached and the use of the Italian language, reflecting a range of topics, from love to the common everyday life scenes.

Freed from restrictions and based on an extensive development of the folk song in the prior or coexisting musical forms, the madrigal bears the mark of the XVIth century Italian Renaissance. Its ascent over a hundred years is uneven and can be divided into three periods. *Arcadelt Jacques, Adrian Willaert, Constanzo Festa* and *Philippe Verdelot* are the representatives of the first period madrigal which was not fully differentiated from the chanson, using the melody for a top voice and the writing for four voices - a homophonic-harmonic writing using imitations to the inner voices, sometimes resorting to crossing techniques, with an increasingly free unfolding. The chromatics and combinations of sounds made by Adrian Willaert will be developed by *Nicolo Vincentino* and *Cypriano Vincentino* who will enhance its expressiveness, introducing an element of tension in music writing. With these composers, the Franco-Flemish school's influence on the development of the Italian madrigal is at its end; the second period, considered to be the classical one, includes *Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's* and *Orlando di Lasso's* creation, to whom we owe the revival of the genre. There are many other great composers of the century such as *Luca Marenzio, Gesualdo da Venosa*, and last but not least *Claudio Monteverdi* who enriched substantially its structure and expression, generating the third period in the evolution of the genre. There is a remarkable emphasis on *drama* which was used to the exaggeration of the *chromatics*. This last step in the development of the Italian Renaissance madrigal highlights, in the creation of this famous triad, the special poetic imagination which covers a rich thematic area, from the pastoral and erotic poetry to the satirical one.

Although initially, the madrigal used to alternate couplets (stanzas of 3 lines, 11 feet) with ritornella [1] (1-2 lines), it later evolves into a simple melodic line, with a polyphonic or harmonic writing for 3, 4 or 5 voices.

We can note, within this genre, the frequent appearance of the parallel thirds and sextets, of the semicadences and final cadences.

In the sixteenth century madrigal, the poetic expression is directly cultivated whereas polyphony develops, the voices gaining, in this context, an equal importance in the ensemble.

The madrigals' texts become an important component, along with the musical inspiration, and to ensure their quality, the composers appeal to the creations of the already renowned poets such as *Francesco Petrarca* and *Torquato Tasso*.

We have to emphasize that during this period, more and more collections of madrigals are printed, thus contributing to the spread of the genre and the enhancement of its resources. We note also that the main creators of the sixteenth century madrigals had acquired extensive composing experience and rich artistic inventiveness, within the sacred music, which contributed to the appearance of highly remarkable works.

In this context, Adrian Willaert carries a rich musical activity at San Marco Church, but he practices intensively the frotola and madrigal genres, and this happened precisely

because of the atmosphere characteristic to this city - a festive atmosphere where music was a central preoccupation.

As *maestro di cappella* (Willaert) has the possibility to lead the famous double choir, composed of two groups placed in the sides of the altar. Their dialogue suggested him compositions where voices alternate or come together in tutti moments; this technique called *cori spezzati* (divided choirs) will be used by other composers such as Orlando di Lasso in his famous madrigal "Echo".

Adrian Willaert makes an obvious contribution to the musical life of Venice, which is recognized at the time and his polyphonic thinking contributes to the strengthening of this technique both in the secular and religious creations.

His madrigals, missas, psalms, hymns, the monumental magnificat and the motets are characterised by a very expressive color, with lots of sound effects and an extremely diverse writing, from 2 to 8 voices.

Adrian Willaert's school formed brilliant students, as it is the case of Cipriano da Rore (1516-1565) who, at the age of 19 became chorister of San Marco Church, under the master's guidance. After his death, he replaced Willaert as *maestro di cappella*. Getting accustomed to the Italian climate, the Flemish Cipriano da Rore accomplished the merge of the Franco-Flemish polyphonic music with the Italian type of suggestiveness, emphasizing the resources of lyrical poetry (especially Petrarch's verse) in works of an unmistakable polyphonic-harmonic mastery. Da Rore tried even to render some descriptive moments or touch the psychological depth of some poetic imagery in his work.

This composer's work captures our interest by the expressive use of the chromatics.

Another student of Adrian Willaert is *Gioseffo Zarlino* (1517-1590) who asserted himself as both *maestro di cappella* and *composer*, as well as illustrious music theorist. He was a former Franciscan monk and poet, called at the time "the red priest" because of his hair color. Skilled organist, Zarlino was also appointed chapel master of San Marco Basilica in 1565 where, besides his compositions, created an acoustico-mathematic theory defining the major and minor modes. Zarlino's application of the system contributed to the development of harmony and the solving of some issues regarding counterpoint, canon techniques, instruments and musical notation. Zarlino's still well-known theoretical work is called "Institutioni harmoniche" (1571). Another contribution of Zarlino's consists in the introduction in the music theory of the Ionian mode as a standard for the major mode and the introduction of the Aeolian mode as a standard for the minor modes - a first step towards establishing the tonal system.

The major mode can be obtained – according to the author – from the ascending sequence of the first six natural harmonics, and the minor one from the descending symmetric sequence of six artificially corresponding sounds. Zarlino's system represented a decisive turning point in the future development of music theory and of harmony in particular, questioning and solving issues about counterpoint, canon equipment, musical instruments and notation [3].

Other chapel masters who worked at San Marco were *Baldassare Donati*, *Giovanni Croce* – Zarlino's disciple - *Nicola Vicentino*, composers who, in addition to their marvelous work, have substantially contributed to the emancipation of chromatics, thus inspiring the Romantic composers whose unmistakable representative was *Gesualdo da Venosa*.

The most spectacular music activity within the successful Venetian school was realized by an illustrious family of musicians, an uncle and a nephew who bore the same name: *Gabrieli*.

Andrea Gabriel (about 1510-1586), disciple of the great Adrian Willaert, exceptional organist (in Verona, first at San Jeremia Church in Venice and later at *San Marco*), introduces instrumental parts in the religious choral works so that the resonance created at the time in

San Marco Basilica was an exceptional one: *cori spezzati, organ and instruments*. Although the scores contained the indication *ad libitum*, Andrea Gabriel's conception was an entirely new one; the instrumental forms interwoven with the vocal ones, created inevitably a special synthesis. At the same time the composer made the effort to keep unified the entire thematic material.

An aspect worth to be mentioned in the music history is that we owe Andrea Gabriel a *sonata* for five instruments, printed in 1595, lost nowadays; bearing a different meaning than what a sonata would signify in the centuries to follow, this kind of work may be performed by human voices.

Educated at Andrea Gabriel's and Orlando di Lasso's school (during a trip to Munich at the court of Duke Albrecht the Vth, between 1575 and 1579), *Giovanni Gabriel* (1557-1612?) is the one who continued the Venetian tradition regarding the use of the organ and the spezzati choirs in the San Marco Basilica; in the spirit of the polyphonic tradition he further promoted the human voice interference with the organ and other instruments. In 1580 he returned to Venice and in 1585 activated (together with his uncle) as main organist of the famous church (San Marco), when Claudio Merulo left the job. After his uncle's death (the next year) he became the main composer and, in parallel, had the same function (main organist) at *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*.

In 1597 Giovanni Gabriel printed *Sacrae Symphoniae*, a collection of instrumental and vocal-instrumental works which, by the use of the root *syn* and the word *phone* (to sing, to say together) intends to suggest the idea of singing as a combination of voices and instruments.

Another work with a unique character is *Sonata piano e forte*, written for two instrumental groups: two trombone alto, a tenor trombone and the higher voice is assigned to a cornet; the second group consists of two tenor trombones and a bass trombone, to which is added the resonance of a violin. The use of a studied counterpoint leads to a concentrating style, built on a rigorous architecture.

The development of the timber conception remarked at Giovanni Gabriel will have significant effects in the achievement of the orchestra promoted by Claudio Monteverdi.

The stylistics of Giovanni Gabriel's work is rich and very peculiar because, besides the sonority and intensity effects, the composer sought to achieve some exalted songs, with frequent modulations, changes in the rhythm, increases and decreases in intensity. He applies these procedures both in the religious and secular works.

Giovanni Gabriel uses the *canzoni* genre for the instrumental plays (*canzoni de sonar*); the *chansons* of the Franco-Flemish school evolve over the XVIth-XVIIth centuries in *canzoni francese (canzoni alla francese)* and, transcribed for instruments such as the organ, harpsichord or lute, would give rise to independent instrumental works. In these works it was made the transition from the vocal technique, previously used (in *chansons, canzoni francese*) and fulfilled by composers such as *Josquin des Pres, Claudine de Sermisz, Pierre Passereau* or *Clément Janequin* to the specifically instrumental techniques, with frequent jumps, more and more pronounced rhythmic formulas, more and more distant from the initial dactyl (long-short-short), with a concert-like characteristic, which prove once more the value of the Venetian instrumentalists. He is considered a precursor of the orchestration even though he left the performers the possibility to decide what tools to use.

Taking advantage of the experience he had in both domains - vocal and instrumental - Gabriel Giovanni will be recognized as a master of polyphony, and also the initiator of a new modern language, in which harmony will have to support the melodic sense and, quite often, it will accompany the song.

Giovanni Gabriel's creations are specific to the Doge's Castle atmosphere and it is a sensational proof of compositional mastery.

4. THE ROMAN SCHOOL

Renaissance composers mastery reached the climax of vocal creation and confirms, once again, that this period is also called *the golden age of vocal polyphony*.

As any arts critic would pass shyly through the cym as with Raphael, Leonardo, Caravaggio and Titian's paintings on them, or be moved closer to Michelangelo's David, Moses or Pieta, the same happens in music with a series of composers who reach the peaks of perfection, so that their presentation could not be done otherwise than chronologically, the value of their work being quite the same.

Rome was a city of contrasts which still felt the influence of the ancient conquerors and popular festivities; Rome – in the Renaissance period- was under the dreaded influence of the Pope and the church strong pressure exerted on the entire social life. In a bid to attract more and more believers to the church and liturgical services, the Vatican opened the doors for what was most valuable during this period in literature, arts and music.

In the Renaissance, all the manifestations that took place in the church bore the mark of artistic beauty tending to perfection. At times, those who governed these institutions were so shocked by the strong influence exerted by secularism that, at some instances, initiated reforms that they imposed with all their energy (the inquisition) [2].

In music, the interference of the popular songs in the religious creations was more and more obvious, together with the increasing complexity of the polyphonic writing which threatened to diminish the religious comprehension of the too elaborate compositions. It was in these moments that the great reformers of the choral art appeared, and the most illustrious name was *Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's*, called at that time *the Catholic liturgical music savior*. He would dominate, along with Orlando di Lasso, the music in the second half of the sixteenth century.

It would be unfair not to mention the important contribution, in fulfilling of the vocal counterpoint, of two other great artists: *Tommaso Lodovico da Vittoria* (Tomas Luis da Victoria approx. 1548/1550-1611) and William Byrd (1543-1623). "Four major artists coming from four countries of ancient cultural traditions (Italy, Flanders, Spain and England), having their own ethnographic and spiritual identity, but united under the same compositional style, the Palestinian one, the first great international musical style ... vocal by excellence and purified of the instrumental elements" [4].

Preceded by great musicians, *Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina* was one of the greatest talents of the Renaissance music, of the universal music history, who included his name among the artistic geniuses of all times.

Born in the small town of Palestrina, near Rome (approx. 1525-1594), he started the music activity in the school choir of Santa Maria Maggiore Church in Rome where he was initiated into the art of the great masters of the Italian and Netherlands schools - Josquin des Pres, Pierre De La Rue, Jean Mouton, Heinrich Isaac and Jacob Arcadelt. In 1551 he had the chance to be appointed "master of the children" at St. Peter's Basilica and advanced to the position of cantor of the papal chapel in the same year. He also performed the duties of bandmaster of San Giovanni Church in Laterano (1555-1560) and Santa Maria Magiorre Church (1561).

He returned to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (1571) as bandmaster, position that he will hold until death.

Following the Council of Trent (1545-1563), he was required to *redefine* the liturgical music which began to exaggerate in terms of technique and, consequently, the writing had become very difficult to be followed. He managed to synthesize in his creation all the previous gains of the counterpoint art while generating a natural, sincere, harmonious

expression and restoring the authenticity of the Gregorian Chant (*Missa Papae Marcelli*). He succeeded to homogenize the style in accordance to the rules imposed by the Vatican; his composition (as well as that of Lasso, Vittoria, Byrd, etc..) acquired an indestructible unity that led to the crystallization of a European impersonal style, called "*palestrinian*" and referring to the whole creation of the era.

Beyond the pretty quiet biography of the composer, one can notice that he was a good organist and choral conductor, remained tied to the land of Italy for his entire life, especially to Rome, where he performed and published his creations.

The Palestrina polyphony covers, selectively, all the elements of compositional technique (the counterpoint) used at that time, creating a style that fits into a unitary conception of synthesis that manages to crystallize all the conquests of the Franco-Flemish and Italian vocal music, and his compositions - like an "ocean" - gather the most important contributions of the previous musicians: "*He summarizes the secular efforts and the thousands of ignored contributions. He is the one who ends and at the same time establishes the musical edifice grounded by his predecessors. Concluding a time, he opens another, looking towards the past and the future at the same time*" [5].

In his creation, the dominant place is occupied by the diatonic melody characterized by a major vocality, creating a specific thematic unity with an intentional independence of each voice. The thematic motives that are used shift from one voice to another by imitations that do not exceed the limit of an octave, but which are meant to develop the song. The progressive movement is sometimes interrupted by jumps used predominantly upward, but which do not disturb the balance of the sound unity. There is a close relationship between the melodic durations and intervals used which generates expressive melodic combinations. Long durations are used at the beginning and the end of the composition and the small ones in the middle. The string of consonances preparing to solve the dissonances, used only by delays and ornamentations that avoid the stressed measures, appear as a feature of the Palestrinian style.

The equidistant position of Palestrina's work from the previous musical achievements but also from those to come (in terms of polyphonic language development) is ensured by his ability to take the essential elements of the Franco-Flemish polyphony (explored from childhood), augmented with the freshness of the Mediterranean music he knows, feels and fully exploits, managing in this way to complete the choral Renaissance art.

The rules rigorously imposed by the polyphonic technique, but at the same time, by the austere environment of the Catholic Church, have the effect of creating a style where rule and inspiration merge into an inimitable synthesis. Overcoming all existing contradictions, this is an important moment in the history of music, of the polyphonic choral art since this great composer succeeds to provide creative technical solutions for both the most complex dramatic moments, but for those where a sense of joy needs to be *offered* (expressed) honestly so that one could contemplate the beauty of nature and the spiritual universe.

In the well-known Exultate Deo motet, he manages to express the feeling of shared joy, using several combinations of voices.

The other side of his work is represented by the secular music, expressing his feelings towards nature and his fellow creatures, using the texts of his great countrymen: *Dante, Petrarch and Tasso*.

Palestrina manages to turn into a way of musical thinking all the aspirations of the time, benefitting of the inspiration that helped him find a balance in all forms and genres that he cultivated. The Palestrinian style is characterized by sobriety, homogeneity, which determined to be considered as the reference style of a cappella religious music, highlighting the ability to speculate with much ease the thematic possibilities; from a thorough analysis of

the features of Palestrina's style, one can notice that his melodic inspiration is far superior to the logic of the discourse.

The relations which are found to be used on the vertical of his composition, determine us to say that he was an innovator, a visionary, a precursor of future expressions, in anticipation of future use of tonal structure through frequent use of both the Ionian and Aeolian modes and by establishing new relationships of "harmony" within the cadences, close to the "classical" thinking. With all these "anticipations", Palestrina's entire compositional work is predominantly modal and also attached to the idea of enhancing the Gregorian monody, on which he applies a personal system of thought.

An important part of Palestrina's creation is for religious services; thus we could mention more than 100 masses, more than 600 small-scale works: motets (several hundred), offertories (66), litanies (8), laments (15) psalms (14), chants, ricercari (for organ) and hymns, plus over 200 madrigals composed throughout his entire creation. Due to the value of his work, he was called „father of music", "savior of music" becoming the etalon for the polyphonic vocal music in the Renaissance [6].

Palestrina's musical genius and the generosity he dedicated himself to his own creation, determined him to share his inspiration evenly, both to the religious and secular genres.

Throughout his creation, exclusively a cappella, Palestrina applied the principle of *dare senso vivo parole* (to give birth to words) resulting melodic lines without using pathetic or dramatic excesses, but using elements arising from a noble and mediative peace of mind.

The generous themes used by Palestrina develop naturally, without flashy style, based on the most subtle and charming polyphonic means; the Palestrinian monothematism emphasizes the mastery of the composer over the thematic material and an inspired development of ideas that succeed in their natural order while the interior music construction follows the text naturalness of drama.

In the entire Palestrinian literature one should note the balance established between the constituent phrases and their unity, between the horizontal dimension (melodico-rhythmic) and the vertical one (harmonic-polyphonic) that fits perfectly the section meanings in its unity and realizes in the same time - by the functions they perform - a wholeness of the sound progression.

The missa *Papae Marcelli*, the missa *Brevis*, the missa *Accedo ad Patrem*, the motet *Sicut cervus desiderat*, the motet *Exultate Deo*, the madrigal *I vaghi fiori* etc. – here are only a small number of his masterpieces which spare us the need to enumerate the full list of opposites as soon as we approach his work.

In addition, we cannot continue without highlighting that all the Palestrinian creations: *praises, offertories, magnificatae, hymns, psalms, litanies* get individualized by an obvious lyrical nature and a reserved affectiveness, deliberately restrained in intervals engaged in highly rigorous constructions [7].

The Catholic mess, the various holidays of the year and the compositions meant for such events, became the reasons that generated creations of high compositional skill.

When considering Palestrina's secular music, which cannot be reduced only to the famous madrigals sung so often, it can be said that for the composer, this genre was the ideal model to achieve the relationship between lyric poetry imagery and the music imagery. We have to mention that Palestrina's "road" to the madrigal occurred from the motet and, having this element at hand, we can understand why the first achievements bear the specific imprint of the motet writing, which he abandons on the way, with the foreshadowing of the compositional elements corresponding to the poetic sensitivity. By means of some stylistic boldness of "harmonic", rhythmic, timbre nature, he is able to find the means to render,

colorfully, the sound correspondences of the poetic images specific to one of the most performed chamber music forms [8].

The perfection of the general architectural construction, the elegant style, the flawless technical counterpoint, fantasy in the expressive use of the dissonances and consonances, the introduction of the sensibiles in the final cadences (the future relationship V-I), the balanced treatment with a unitarian vision of the voices, their use in the most generous sound registers, subtle synthesis, intelligent and natural between the traditional and innovative elements at the basis of whom one can recognize the Gregorian melody and the secular Italian melos - here are the qualities that recommend Palestrina as a leader of his generation and not only.

Considered to be the most important figure of the Renaissance music, his work encloses (or imposes!) the attributes of his age, his style summarizing the previous polyphonic art, and at the same time, anticipating the music of the centuries to come.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's creation will become a model for study and analysis for all those who start to unravel the mysteries of the Renaissance polyphony.

His followers: *Giovanni Maria* and *Giovanni Bernardino Nanino*, *Francesco* and *Felice Anerio*, *Marc Antonio Igegneri*, *Francesco Sorino*, *Gregorio Allegri*, etc. continued on the master's footsteps and enriched the choral work, using both the traditional elements of that time but also deviations from the strict style in their desire to bring a new spirit, to offer compositions that might express both the manner of the time as well as the personal spirit.

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