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Veneration of the Virgin Mary was one of the most important aspects of Christianity during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and sacred music of the time incorporated many Marian concepts. The Virgin Mary was considered the greatest intercessor with God and Christ at a time when fear of Purgatory was strong. Prayers and devotions seeking her aid were among the most significant aspects of spiritual life, and texts of this kind were set to music for devotional use. Beyond her identity as intercessor, there were many additional conceptions of her, and these also found musical expression.

The purpose of this study was, first, to explore the basic elements of Marian devotion, and, second, to examine how veneration of Mary was expressed musically. Seven musical compositions from c. 1200-1600 are examined as representative examples.

The “Marian aspects” of some compositions may be as straightforward as the use of texts that address Mary, or they may be found in musical and textual symbolism. Of special interest is a particular genre of motet used in private devotions. Precise and detailed information about how sacred music was used in the Middle Ages and Renaissance is scarce, but evidence related to this particular kind of devotional motet helps bring together a number of elements related to Marian meditative practices and the kind of physical settings in which these took place, allowing a greater understanding of the overall performance context of such music. This deeper awareness can help guide today’s performance.

MUSIC IN HONOR OF THE VIRGIN MARY DURING THE
MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

by

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CHAPTER I

MARIAN DEVOTION IN MUSIC – HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Veneration of Mary was a predominant theme of Christian worship from the beginning of Christendom into the Middle Ages and later, and is reflected in the music of those times. The purpose of this study is to explain what Marian devotion was and how this practice was reflected in sacred polyphony from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Musical examples from this time period will be used to illustrate select significant points. Information from various sources can be assembled to provide evidence of how some of this music may have been performed, giving musicians today a deeper understanding of context that can influence performance.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary - Background

The religious views of the people of the Middle Ages were built around concepts that had existed since the beginning of Christianity. Included among the most potent of these were the understanding of the nature of Christ, the belief of inescapable judgment for one's sins, and fear of the loss of eternal salvation. Along with these deep concerns, however, were elements of hope based on pious acts and rites that could be undertaken in this life and after death, and, above all, on the help that could be afforded by the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints.

Spiritual concerns in the Middle Ages

One of the best known books of the Middle Ages was *The Golden Legend*, assembled around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine, the Dominican archbishop of Genoa. This large book is a compilation of legends associated with prominent saints and events from the New Testament and Apostolic times. Even leafing through the pages of this book makes it is easy to see that the conception of Christ was not as a gentle savior but rather as the stern Judge of the Last Judgment. Christ did bring salvation, but he is just and will cause one to account for one's life. The opening section of the book, on the Advent of Christ, speaks of his implacable judgment, about how at death a sinner, standing before Christ, will face multiple accusers including Satan and his own guardian angel. His own sins, his conscience, and the very world he offended will be given voice to speak against him. St. Gregory is quoted:

Oh how narrow are the ways for the condemned! Above them an angry judge, below them the horrid abyss, on the right their accusing sins, on the left hordes of demons dragging them to torment, inside of them their burning conscience, outside, the world afire.¹

Two judgments awaited each person, one immediately upon death and the other at the end of time. At death the sinless soul could be admitted to heaven directly, but only those who were totally pure, such as the martyred saints, could enter God's presence without purification. It was believed that the vast majority of persons who were not consigned to Hell would be required to suffer a period in the purifying flames of

¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 12.

purgatory. The concept of purgatory must be seen in the Christian context of the “communion of saints,” the idea that all Christians, living or dead, on earth, in purgatory, or in heaven, are tied to each other and can affect the other’s welfare.

One of the earliest teachings of the Christian church is that the living are in a state of spiritual communion with those in purgatory and that sacred actions by the living – prayers and masses – can assist the dead by invoking intercession. This doctrine was decreed by the Council of Trent: “there is a purgatory, and that [those] therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar [i.e. mass];...”²

One could also be helped in this life and at the time of one’s judgment by appealing to those who were already in the presence of God and Christ and could intercede. These personages included the saints but above all the Virgin Mary. Devotions and prayers to Mary and the saints became one of the most central elements of medieval Christianity.

Mary had held an important role from the beginning of the church. She is written about in the New Testament, of course, and writings from the first century discuss the abiding faith in the virgin birth. Her important role is discussed at length by the church fathers, including Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and St. Gregory. By the fifth century many churches had been built in her honor, and by the seventh century most of the major Marian feasts had been well established.

² New Advent. The Catholic Encyclopedia, “Purgatory,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12575a.htm> (accessed January 3, 2010).

The many identities of Mary

A partial listing of the qualities and properties associated with Mary helps show the breadth of her meaning.

She was Mother of God (Theotokos), mother of Christ, the Sorrowing Mother (Stabat Mater) of her crucified son, Bride of God and Christ, perfect ever Virgin, the Vessel of Salvation, the Gate into Heaven, anti-Eve (because the sin of Adam and Eve was repaired through her), Star of the Sea, and the beloved of the Song of Songs. She was associated with Springtime, with Wisdom, and with nature and flowers. There was an allegorical association between Mary and the subjects of courtly love poetry. Above all, Mary was the most effective intercessor with Christ, a mother who had empathy with man because of the pain she felt at her own son's death, a nurturer who wanted to be asked for help.

Marian devotions – Saturday votives, the Little Office of the Virgin, the Book of Hours

From the first century many and various prayers and pious actions had developed related to Mary's honor. Around the eleventh century these many kinds of devotion moved into church liturgies with more formal structure. Much of this developed first in monasteries. Saturdays were specially devoted to the Virgin; the Marian antiphons, beginning with *Salve Regina*, and other significant hymns were given important placement in daily devotions; prayers that would become known throughout Europe were written; an entire set of Office Hours, the "Little Office of the Virgin," which mirrored the normal Canonical Hours, was developed and chanted at least weekly if not daily, and

in many churches a votive Lady Mass or “Salve” Mass was held in addition to the mass for the day.³ The Marian antiphon appropriate for the particular time of the church year came to be sung at the close of each day at the end of Compline, with the admonition that Mary should be one’s final thought before retiring. All important churches had an altar to the Virgin, and the number of churches built in her name could not be numbered.

Saturdays became strongly associated with Marian devotions largely through the influence of Alcuin (c. 740-804), the greatly popular cleric who fashioned the liturgies under Charlemagne. Alcuin among others saw Mary as the one who remained faithful on the day following the Crucifixion⁴, a Saturday, and Alcuin stressed in this way Mary’s human empathy. Saturday devotionals became organized largely around intercession.⁵

The “Little Office of the Virgin” consisted of eight hours or services, each corresponding to one of the canonical hours, and also based around adoration and intercession. Though referred as “little,” these are as substantial as their matched canonical hours. These offices and the nature of their texts would come to have enormous influence in the later Middle Ages. When the Little Hours first began to be written down they were usually placed within monastic liturgical books, mainly breviaries. As the Middle Ages progressed and the common people desired ways to emulate a more holy life, and a life structured in ways similar to the church year and daily offices, they also wished to share in the Little Hours for themselves. Before this time the only book available to the lay population might be a copy of the Psalter, and the Little Hours were

³ David Rothenberg, “Marian feasts, seasons, and songs in medieval polyphony: Studies in musical symbolism” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2004), 15.

⁴ Nolan Ira Gasser, “The Marian Motet Cycles of the Gaffurius Codices: A Musical and Liturgico-devotional study” (PhD diss., Standord University, 2001), 83.

⁵ Gasser, 88.

appended to psalters, but later the Psalter was displaced and the Little Hours became the central portion of what came to be called the Books of Hours.

Books of Hours were precious personal possessions, and to the Hours themselves were added certain “standard” components that allowed the Books to support much of the devotional life of its owner. These additional sections typically included a calendar that indicated all important feasts and seasons of the liturgical year, four important Gospel readings, special prayers including the extremely well-known “O Intemerata” and “Obsecro te”, the Mass to the Virgin (Lady Mass), the Requiem Mass, and some set of intercessory prayers to Mary and the saints.

The content and use of these Books bears directly on an understanding of the music of the mid and later Middle Ages. As described below, the Book of Hours relates to the organized worship of the time as well as to the nature of private devotions, and this is strongly reflected in the intent of much sacred polyphony of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Marian Feasts: the story of Mary reflected in the church year

Mary had the largest number of feast days in the annual cycle of the church year, and the placement and purpose of these feasts is important in understanding texts and any music that could be aligned to these.

Table 1. Marian feasts and antiphons within the church year

Season of the Church Year / Marian Feast	Marian antiphon assigned to the portion of the church year
Advent Conception (of Mary), Dec. 8	Alma redemptoris mater
Epiphany Purification, Feb. 2 (Jesus and Mary are presented to the Temple)	
Septuagesima/Lent Annunciation, March 25 (Gabriel tells Mary she will have the child)	Ave regina caelorum
Easter (March 22-April 25)	Regina caeli
Pentecost Visitation, July 2 (Mary visits Elizabeth) Assumption (of Mary to Heaven), August 15 Nativity (of Mary), September 8	Salve regina

It will be seen that the three events that relate to Mary's motherhood of Jesus occur in succession: the Purification, Annunciation, and Visitation. These are also the events that are included in the New Testament Gospel of Luke. The Purification, Luke 2:22-35, occurred on the fortieth day after the birth of Jesus, when the law stated that he must be presented to the temple. The law also said that after this interval the mother of a male child should also present herself, for purity. It was during this visit that the child Jesus was seen by Simeon, who then spoke the *Nunc dimittis*.

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) describes how the angel Gabriel greeted Mary with the words *Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus* (Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed are thou among women), a text which became the

first part of the Ave Maria.⁶ This scene became one of the most frequently used in visual arts of the period, but it is interesting that musical settings of texts related to the Annunciation are not abundant, probably because this feast usually fell within Lent when music of celebration would be less appropriate.⁷

The Visitation (Luke 1:39-56) tells of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. On seeing Mary, Elizabeth cried *Benedicta tu inter mulieres et benedictus fructus ventris tui* (Blessed are thou among women, and blessed in the fruit of they womb), text which would later be added to Gabriel's salutation to form the remainder of the Ave Maria. This passage of Luke also contains Mary's Magnificat.

The other feasts of Mary - her Conception, her Assumption to heaven after her death, and later, her Nativity - are not mentioned in scripture, but portions of the Old Testament and some apocryphal writings came to be seen as allegorical or prophetic about these events. Much of the language found in these texts is richly pictorial and formed the basis of many Marian symbols. These prophecies include Isaiah 45:8, (drop down dew,... let the earth be opened, and bud forth a flower) and Isaiah 11:1-2, (And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.) Many verses in the *Song of Songs* were seen as an allegory of the spiritual marriage between Christ and Mary or Christ and the church. Psalm 44 has a nuptial theme again seen to reflect the relation between Christ and Mary. A powerful symbol came from the Revelations of St. John 12:16, which contains the verse *And a great sign appeared in the*

⁶ Anne Walters Robertson, "Remembering the Annunciation in Medieval Polyphony," *Speculum*. 70, no. 2 (Apr., 1995): 281.

⁷ Robertson, 276.

heaven: A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. Legends surrounding Mary's birth and early years were found in the apocryphal Gospel of James, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and the *Libellus de nativitate Sanctae Mariae* (Book of the birth of Saint Mary).⁸

The Mass, and the service life of a church

A rough distinction can be made between two usages of the Mass. One that will be considered later would be those Masses held as part of private or group devotions, where they coexisted with other devotional expressions. The other is the central Mass of the day, celebrated in the chancel of a church at the central altar.

For the laity, this “main” Mass combined elements of spectacular display⁹ with a sacred, sometimes mysterious, rite. It should be kept in mind that the typical type of church service today, with a congregation being “served” by witnessing and participating in a worship service, was not at all typical of the Middle Ages.

The Mass was celebrated in the chancel of the church (i.e., the forward section near the altar), surrounded by the participating clergy and singers. The chancel area was partially separated and hidden from the nave of the church by screens of some kind, typically a kind of lattice-like rood screen. Laity on the outside of the chancel would be able to look within, but were not necessarily near enough to hear the words being spoken.

⁸ Rothenberg, 31 .

⁹ Robert Norman Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100.

At times clergy could address any laity present, as in some homilies, but overall the sacred rite was carried out within the confine of the chancel itself.

The laity infrequently took communion, and when they did they consumed only the host (bread), not the wine. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that the laity should confess and receive communion at least once a year, usually at Easter.¹⁰

During these centuries the impressiveness of the Mass, its “complexity, choreography, trappings, garments, and music”¹¹ increased. The people would often bring Books of Hours to Mass: while the priestly sacred rite which they might not be able to follow was celebrated vicariously for them, they themselves participated in private meditations based on the images and prayers they saw in their Books.

During Mass, motets could be sung at certain junctures. The possible locations within the service tended to be those where lengthy actions by the priests needed to be performed, as in the cleansing of the altar and other preparations for communion. These mass sections were the Offertory, Elevation, and as a replacement for the *Benedicamus Domino* (Let us bless the Lord) near the close of the Mass when the clergy exited.¹²

Of these, the Elevation of the Host, when the priest would lift the host up above his head, received by far the most attention by the laity. It will be stated below that vision was considered a manner for establishing contact with the divine, be it the viewing of a saint’s relic or a sacred image. The transubstantiation of the host into the physical body of

¹⁰ Swanson, 99.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jeremy Noble and Martin Just, "The Function of Josquin's Motets," *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*, D. 35ste, Afl. 1ste/2de, *Proceedings of the Josquin Symposium* (1985): 11-12.

Christ which occurred at the Elevation was the highest of such moments and, for the laity, the most important. A motet could very likely be sung at this important event.

It can be kept in mind also that the activities of a large church were filled with services day and night. Craig Wright shows the typical daily schedule for a non-feast day¹³.

Table 2. Typical daily schedule of canonical hours and mass

<i>Midnight:</i>	<i>Morning: often 8am but could be as early as 6:30 to accommodate complex services.</i>	<i>Evening: 3:30pm</i>
Matins Lauds Lauds of the Dead Matins and Lauds of BVM Memorial for the Holy Cross Memorial for Relics Memorial for All Saints Marian antiphon	Prime Prime of BVM Obit Mass Procession of Ave regina Terce Mass of the day Sext Sext of BVM	Nones Nones of BVM Vespers Vespers and Matins of the Dead Vespers of BVM Memorial for the Holy Cross Memorial for Relics Memorial for All Saints Compline Compline of BVM Marian antiphon (before 6pm)

Of the services apart from Mass, few of these would be attended by any laity. The many Hours were usually observed in side chapels often with lesser numbers of clerics, though at the Cathedral of Notre Dame these continued to be held at the main altar.

¹³ Craig Wright, *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris 500-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 104.

Votive devotions

Of great relevance to the topic of Marian devotions and the music tied to it is the vast numbers of votive observations that were held. A votive¹⁴ or “volitional” service could be endowed by an individual or group and could consist of various content ranging from a whole set of hours, a mass, or a single prayer.¹⁵ There was an enormous growth in the number of these during the mid to late Middle Ages that paralleled the growing desire for intercessory actions. Around 1000 there were 57 priests serving the side chapels and altars at Notre Dame, and by the sixteenth century there were 126 priests at 42 chapels and altars. All these had to be scheduled in such a way that they not interfere with the Hours and Masses at the central altar.¹⁶

These endowed votive services were usually said by a sole priest in a side chapel or altar of a larger church. A patron could request and pay for services that sought intercession before his death, and the endowment often stipulated that Requiem masses be said after his death.¹⁷ Other observances could appeal to saints or to Mary, but the devotional nature of the texts that were used tended to be in the vein of Books of Hours prayers rather than the kind of texts used in formal liturgy.

That these votives were not liturgically bound is significant. Whereas the texts of Masses and canonical hours were fixed by the structure of the church calendar, the texts

¹⁴ From the Latin *votum*, “special intent.”

¹⁵ Wright, 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Anne Walters Robertson, “The Mass of Guillaume de Machaut in the Cathedral of Reims,” in *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony*, Thomas Forest, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 120.

of votives could be used flexibly whenever their texts would be appropriate for a particular devotional event.

Wealthy patrons could privately endow services of this kind for themselves and family members. People from the working class could make donations corporately, such as the confraternities of northern Europe which were the sacred arm of the trade guilds.

Meditation and vision

Few records have been found in the course of this study that directly refer to the devotional purpose of music within these services. However, much was written about the goal and methods of meditation within devotional and prayer services. Music and polyphony were not commonly heard during these events during the earlier Middle Ages, though it is known that polyphony was sung at times, especially at wealthy courts in the later fifteenth century. Some musical examples will be given later, but an indication of the type of spiritual state in which worshippers tried to place themselves can be found in statements about the use of sight within the devotional experience.

People believed that seeing a sacred object helped establish a link into the divine world beyond. A saint's presence was believed to be present in any fragment of the saint's bodily remains. St. Gregory of Nyssa, c.335-394, wrote:

Those who behold [relics] embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the sense into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present.¹⁸

¹⁸ Stefania Rosenstein, "Bodies of Heaven and Earth: Christ and the Saints in Medieval Art and Devotion," in *Pious Journeys: Christian Devotional Art and Practice In the Later Middle Ages and*

The Fourth Lateran Council allowed that viewing the transubstantiated elements at the elevation was as efficacious as consuming them, and such action was described as eating by sight, communion with the eyes.¹⁹

Vision and images – real or imagined - were also urged as the means for private devotions, and to this end images such as paintings or the illustrations in Books of Hours or sculpture were to be concentrated upon with the greatest sense of immediacy. The goal was mental and spiritual immersion, to so clearly imagine oneself in the actual presence of what was viewed that a spiritual connection might take place. In this way the person came closer and closer to the divine and their prayers might be better heard.

A well-known example comes from the lavish Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy, wife of Emperor of Maximilian I and mother of Marguerite of Austria. In one painting within her Book of Hours we see Mary reading from that very book, while outside her open window we see not the outside, but rather a vision of the Virgin seated in a celestial chapel, with Mary of Burgundy herself kneeling there in the Virgin's presence. This depicts the clarity of the experience that Mary of Burgundy is seeking. Later in Mary's book, we see a similar window, but Mary of Burgundy herself is not depicted. All that is depicted is what she sees: through the open window is shown the crucifixion through her own eyes – she has merged closer to the reality of what she contemplates. There are even bystanders in the scene looking back at her, making the

Renaissance, ed. Linda Seidel (The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 2001), 21.

¹⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Meaning in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché, eds. (Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University in association with Princeton University Press, 2006):228.

experience all the more realistic. Below, in a discussion about a piece by Pierre de la Rue, historic information will be shown that helps tie together the concepts of devotion, vision, and music.

The context for polyphony

Most of the music that would have been heard in the vast number of worship services would have been monophonic chant. Early polyphony seems to have arisen as both a means of heightening the importance of particular Masses or elements within the Mass, or adding to the distinction of personally endowed devotions. Records from Notre Dame show both. Organum – improvised and written - was required at certain high feasts, while other organum was tied to endowments made by individuals.²⁰ The earliest polyphony coming from the Low Countries is all related to endowed services, most of this consisting of Elevation motets or masses on Marian chants. The earliest Masses, including Machaut's and the mass from Tournai, have been shown to have been written for Marian devotions. Machaut directed that his mass be sung at a particular altar of Reims after his death for the remembrance of his soul and his brother's. Polyphony, as a kind of precious gift, tended to be used in devotions in side chapels before it was used in the chancel, and its increasing use matched the time when the side altars and chapels

²⁰ Barbara Hagg, "The Meeting of Sacred Ritual and Secular Piety: Endowments for Music," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, Tess Knighton and David Fallows, ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 67.

themselves were receiving greater adornments of painting and sculptures as individuals attached greater value to their intercessory purpose.²¹

Before about 1475 many motets were written on Marian texts that were drawn from or similar to the kinds of devotional texts found in Books of Hours. These non-liturgical texts would have prevented such motets from being used in Masses as polyphonic substitutions for prescribed texts in the liturgy, though they could have been sung as “extra-liturgical adornments”²² at the junctures mentioned above, i.e. Offertory, Elevation, or as a substitute for the *Benedicamus Domino*.

Howard Meyer Brown sees Petrucci’s publication of 175 motets in four volumes (1502-1505) as representative of the kinds of texts that were in demand by the church and chapel choirs.²³ The largest category is based on devotional texts very similar to those of the Book of Hours, and the majority of these address Mary. There are also found here motet settings of the Marian antiphons. Brown points out the interesting fact that the Petrucci books themselves are small, not nearly of the large choirbook size, implying that devotional pieces, which would have been sung in smaller chapels, would have been sung by small numbers of singers.

²¹ Anne Walters Robertson, “The Mass of Guillaume de Machaut in the Cathedral of Reims,” in *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony*, ed. Thomas Forrest Kelly (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 118.

²² Howard Meyer Brown, “The Mirror of Man’s Salvation: Music in Devotional Life about 1500,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter, 1990): 750.

²³ Brown: 746.

CHAPTER II

SEVEN MARIAN COMPOSITIONS c. 1200-1600

The following seven works span the period under consideration and are meant to serve as samples of part of the broad array of musical Marian devotions, an enormous topic. What is intended here is variety, not uniformity of approach. The pieces include works that are “Marian” because of their text only; works which reveal that artistic creativity itself was a means of honoring and pleasing Mary; various types of symbolism that listeners of the day would understand as focusing the meaning of a work; one excellent example by Pierre de la Rue that brings together many strands of the information already described; and music from later in the period during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

***Ex semine* - Perotin (fl. c. 1200)**

The source of this work is the Montpellier Codex, where it is credited to Perotin. It is a textbook example of the early motet. The cantus firmus *Ex semine* (from seed) is untexted except for the incipit. It is a chant from the service for the Nativity of the Virgin and is found in the Bamberg Codex. In the motet the cantus firmus has been given a simple isorhythmic talea that repeats seven times, although the final statement is rhythmically altered so that the final talea contains seven pitches. The occurrence of the holy number seven may be symbolic.

Each of the two lines above the cantus firmus has been given its own text, both tied to the meaning held by the cantus firmus and filled with Marian and Christologic symbolism, especially many different symbolic references to different faces of Mary.

Both upper lines begin with the words *Ex semine* (from seed) and end with *sine semine* (without seed). There are allusions to both the idea of the virgin Nativity of Mary herself, and to the Virgin birth of Christ, poetically developing a kind of parallelism in which Mary and Christ reflect each other.

The upper line (triplum) contains the symbolic reference of Mary being born from the thorn, related to Isaiah 11:1-2: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root;...” Jesse associates Mary with the line of David.²⁴ The second vocal line (motettus) contains much similar imagery but is more Christocentric. Between the two texts is a balance of contemplation between the conception and birth of both Christ and Mary.

Triplum: Ex semine rosa prodit spine;
fructus oleae oleastro legitur;
virgo propagine nascitur Iudee;
stelle matutine radius exoritur nubis caligine,
radio sol stelle;
petra fluit melle;
parit flos puellae verbum sine semine.

The rose comes forth from the seed of the thorn;
the fruit of the olive is plucked from the olive-tree;
a virgin is born of the people of Judea;
the ray of the morning star rises from the blackness
of the clouds, and from the ray of the star, the sun;
the rock flows with honey; the maiden's flower gives
birth to the Word without a seed.

Motettus: Ex semine Abrahae divino moderamine
ignem pio numine producis, Domine,
hominis salutem.
Paupertate nuda virginis nativitatem de tribu Iudae
iam propinas ovum per natale novum.
Pisces, panem dabis, partum sine semine.

From the seed of Abraham, under heaven's direction,
you, O Lord, bring forth by your pious power a fire,
the salvation of mankind.
From naked poverty, from the birth of a virgin of the
tribe of Judah, you furnish an egg in a novel
childbirth, You will give loaves and fishes, and birth
without a seed.

(*Cantus firmus*) EX SEMINE

From seed

²⁴ Rothenberg, 27.

Figure 1. *Ex semine*, opening.

The image shows the opening of a musical score for 'Ex semine'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in 6/8 time, with lyrics: 'Ex se - - mi - ne ro - sa prod - it spi - ne; fru - ctus o - le - e o - le - a - stro'. The middle staff is a second vocal line with lyrics: 'Ex se - - mi - ne A - bra - he di - vi - no mo - de - ra - mi - ne i - gnem pi - o'. The bottom staff is a lute or keyboard accompaniment, with the text 'EX SEMINE' written below it. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests.

This piece could not have been used in a Nativity service at the location when its cantus firmus would be sung because of the addition of the non-liturgical texts, and beyond this its usage cannot be known. But, like many of the early motets, it reflects the infusion of both the creative and the intellectual on multiple levels. A piece such as this could have been heard in a devotional setting or could be heard as art music of its time. Margaret Bent has said that the motet appealed to the learned, to those who could appreciate its construction and meaning, its delicious complexity. She articulates well how composers responded creatively to fashion finely crafted works of art, and that

the motet provided for the first time a vehicle that could present different musical, textual and symbolic ideas truly simultaneously. It wraps counterpointed text and music artfully together for aural, visual, numerical, symbolic, and other forms of intellectual contemplation....²⁵

***Ave maris stella* - Guillaume Dufay (1397-1474)**

Ave maris stella was one of the most beloved hymns to Mary. It was sung at vespers of the canonical hours on Marian feasts and in the Hours of the Virgin on

²⁵ Margaret Bent, "The Late-Medieval Motet," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, Tess Knighton and David Fallows, eds.) New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 114.

numerous occasions.²⁶ The hymn was composed at least by the ninth century, and the Star of the Sea image became one of Mary's most widely-known symbols.

Selected stanzas given below show again some of the various aspects of Mary's meaning.

"Ever Virgin" refers to the belief that she remained virgin before and after the birth of Christ. The metaphor of her as the "gate of heaven" was very common.

Ave maris stella,
Dei Mater alma,
Atque semper Virgo,
Felix cœli porta.

Hail, star of the sea,
bountiful mother of God
and ever Virgin,
happy gate of heaven.

Sumens illud Ave
Gabrielis ore,
Funda nos in pace,
Mutans Evæ nomen.

Taking that Ave
from the mouth of Gabriel,
preserve us in peace,
giving Eve a new name.

Monstra te esse matrem,
Sumat per te preces,
Qui pro nobis natus,
Tulit esse tuus.

Show thyself to be a mother,
may he who was born for us
receive our prayers through thee.

The word *Ave* came to have special meaning and treatment. It is the first word spoken to Mary by Gabriel at the Annunciation, from whence, as has been mentioned, it became the beginning of the Ave Maria text.

Another metaphor, found here and elsewhere, is based on a play with the letters of the important word "ave" and can be seen in the second stanza. Mary was considered the opposite of Eve: where Eve had brought sin to all mankind, Mary had brought redemption. The letters of the Latin word for "Eve", namely "Eva", could be rearranged as a play on words to imply how redemption (Mary, as symbolized by Gabriel's "Ave")

²⁶ Rothenberg, 66.

was “made from” “Eva”. Another example is the medieval carol popular today which has the refrain *Nova, nova, ave fit ex Eva*: (News, news, ‘Hail’ is made from Eve.)

Dufay’s setting of the hymn is in fauxbourdon style, in which a main melody is joined by other lines that strictly follow the melody at specific intervals. Most fauxbourdon were simply written in two lines a sixth apart, and the middle line was improvised a fourth below the top. These kinds of works are relatively simple and easy to create and are within the early practice of improvised polyphony. Such techniques provided the means to adorn important melodies at special times, though done in a way that could be managed within the great volume of music demanded in the masses and offices.

Dufay was one of the most prolific composers of a more elaborated style of fauxbourdon. Willem Elders has found 170 compositions from 1425-1510 that have the instruction *fauxbourdon* and 24 are by Dufay, more than any other composer who can be identified.²⁷ Half of Dufay’s fauxbourdon are hymn settings and were meant to be performed with chant stanzas alternating with fauxbourdon stanzas.

In Dufay’s setting, the *Ave Maris Stella* hymn melody is greatly elaborated in the top voice of the three-voice texture. The bass line (the lowest) is freely composed, only sometimes participating in the standard fauxbourdon intervals.

There are two solutions for the middle line. The original manuscript contains the instruction *fauxbourdon*, meaning that the middle voice may simply mirror the top voice

²⁷ Willem Elders, *Symbolic Scores: Studies in the Music of the Renaissance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 18.

at a fourth below. Or, the middle voice may sing a more elaborate line that Dufay composed, yielding a more equally engaged three-part motion.

Performance of this piece is best as originally intended, with stanzas of chant sung by a body of singers alternating with the fauxbourdon sung by soloists. It can be a challenge for contemporary ears to sense that the chant and the fauxbourdon represent two worlds: the chant is ancient, beautiful, and serene, an effect more strongly felt because of the comfortable balancing of phrase weights and directions in the chant. In contrast, Dufay's lines are in the style modern in his time, and can bear considerable expressive weight and freedom. He "always paraphrased the plainsong in such a way that the old chant was 'translated'²⁸ into the language of the fifteenth century."²⁹

What is specifically Marian about this piece is primarily the imagery within the text and how the use of polyphony reflects the importance of the subject. Polyphony of any kind indicates that the material on which it is based is special or that its occurrence in a particular sacred service wants emphasis. Fauxbourdon seems simple, and it is indeed true that basic improvised fauxbourdon was an easy way to add polyphony to standard church music. In the case of Dufay, however, one should strive to hear that his composed lines adorn and paraphrase his subject with fresh and reverent beauty, creating material for musical worship that is alive and vivid. This idea, combined with the great honor afforded Mary in all cases, deepens the meaning and impact a performance can carry.

²⁸ David Fallows, *Dufay* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1982), 136

²⁹ Elders, 19.

Ave Sanctissima Maria – Pierre de La Rue (c. 1452 – 1518)

This is one of the finest examples showing the nature of the important Marian devotional motet genre, and is rich in showing how music of the time can reveal multiple aspects of devotions and worship.

Bonnie Blackburn has written about the original text, a variant of which is used in La Rue's setting.³⁰

Original:

Ave sanctissima Maria
Mater dei, regina celi,
Porta paradisi, domina mundi.
Tu singularis pura es virgo;
Tu concepisti Jesum sine macula;
Tu peperisti Creatorem et Salvatorem
mundi,
in quo non dubito.
Libera me ab omni malo;
Ora pro peccato meo. Amen.

La Rue:

Ave sanctissima Maria,
Mater Dei, Regina celi,
Porta paradisi, domina mundi,
Tue es singulatis virgo pura,
Tu concepisti Jhesum de spiritu sancto,
Tu concepisti creatorem
mundi
In quo ego no dubito.
Ora pro me Jhesum
Et libera me ab omnibus.

The original text was written by Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471-1484) and is a prayer to the Virgin Mary, but Sixtus accompanied the prayer with the statement: *Sixtus dedit ad sequentem orationem, quam et ipse confecit, XI milia annorum, et debet dici coram imagine beatae virginis in sole*, which means that an indulgence reducing one's time in purgatory by 11,000 years will be granted to anyone who devoutly says the prayer while gazing on an image of the virgin *in sole* (in the sun).

³⁰ Bonnie J. Blackburn, "The Virgin in the Sun: Music and Image for a Prayer Attributed to Sixtus IV," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 124, no. 2 (1999): 157.

Long before the monetary form, indulgences were instituted by the church to strengthen an individual's piety as well as the church itself. Indulgences could be granted only by the Pope and were given in exchange for pious acts on the part of persons that also benefitted the overall faith. Some of these acts were various prayers which reduced time in Purgatory by various durations.

Knowledge of this prayer became widespread, probably because it was short and easy to memorize, and because of the large indulgence. It was also set to music many times. Blackburn lists over 40 compositions based on the prayer or its multiple textual variants.³¹ That so many versions of the text are found probably indicates that it was transmitted orally and from memory.³²

Blackburn draws attention to the use of the first person singular in the final two lines of the poem, a fact that causes Blackburn to label musical settings of such texts as prayer motets. Texts of the Mass and liturgy are rarely in the first person singular. Texts that use "I" or "me" are closer to private devotional texts. The *Ave sanctissima Maria* text itself can be found in many Books of Hours.

The interesting phrase *in sole* is also explained by Blackburn. The virgin "in the sun" makes reference to the passage from Revelations 12 mentioned earlier, the image of a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. This phrase, however, is more theologically loaded than would first appear. During the Middle Ages the idea that Mary herself had been conceived immaculately was under controversy. This idea was favored by Franciscans but not supported by

³¹ Blackburn: 168.

³² Ibid.

Dominicans and others. The woman from Revelations had come to be seen as a symbol for the Mary of the Immaculate Conception. Sixtus, himself a Franciscan, in granting an indulgence to those who said this prayer while beholding an image of the virgin *in sole* was therefore reinforcing the idea of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This concept is centered on line 4 of the text, where many variants can be found in different sources: the singular purity of Mary comes from the fact of her sinless conception.³³

Pierre de La Rue's setting of this prayer is found in the Chanson book of Marguerite of Austria, where this sacred piece is placed first in an otherwise secular collection of chansons. La Rue was Marguerite's favored composer. Marguerite was daughter of Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy of the ruling house of the Hapsburg-Burgundians, and La Rue spent most of his career serving the Hapsburg-Burgundian court. The 6-voice piece consists of three simultaneous 2-voice canons.

The motet's positioning and presentation in the manuscript is telling. In the upper left corner where the illuminated capital for the first letter of the superius is located there is a painting of the virgin with the sun behind her, standing on a crescent moon, and angels holding a crown above her head. In the upper left corner of the facing page is a likeness of Marguerite kneeling in prayer, devoutly looking at the image of Mary on the left page. This depiction is in keeping with the attitude of devoutness the Pope required, and furthermore shows Marguerite in contemplation of an image of the Virgin *in sole*.

La Rue's musical setting, as well, may reflect the manner in which this piece might be sung. The melodic lines tend to be rather simple and spare, never elaborate.

³³ Ibid.

Many of the successive points of imitation are based merely on lines beginning with the repetition of a single pitch. Like some of La Rue's other music, there are sections of quite low tessitura in the lower parts, especially the final appeals for remembrance and deliverance from evil.

Beyond the fact that the text is a meditative prayer, a further element that may affect the expressive manner for performing this piece might be found in considering why La Rue was favored by certain members of the Hapsburg family. This was one of the most powerful families of the era. Emperor Maximilian, Holy Roman Emperor, married Mary of Burgundy, and had three children: Philip the Fair, Marguerite of Austria, and another child who died shortly after birth. Philip, a notorious philanderer, married Joanna of Castile. Joanna was smitten by Philip, but his dreadful treatment of her along with enormous political pressure and insensitivity from her father caused her to go mad.³⁴ La Rue's music, perhaps its deep sonorities and tenderness, was known to bring her some solace, and La Rue stayed with the Spanish court some years. Marguerite also suffered many pains. Two husbands died young and she vowed never to marry again, instead devoting her life to her realm. She was associated with sorrow, and La Rue's music brought her comfort as well.

Whether this history should affect performance is a conductor's choice. But La Rue's setting is best heard through gentleness and nuance. The simple melodies are meant to carry prayerful words and always lead to beautiful cadences. A shift to a brighter modal feeling when Jesus is mentioned is followed by a statement of clear faith

³⁴ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Joan the Mad."

with the text “you conceived the creator of the world, in which I do not doubt.” The closing *ora pro me...* (pray for me) is marked by lines that descend stepwise through the musical interval of a 7th and by low resonant harmonies.

Possible settings for the performance of this motet could be in the chamber, chapel, or court of Marguerite. The use of a personal (first person singular) non-liturgical text would make its use in a mass difficult. Therefore it is likely that the performance setting was in a room smaller than a large church, with the possibility of greater intimacy, immediacy, and nuance. The music should match its setting and purpose and support an attitude of devout contemplation and immersive concentration; it should, perhaps, honor and support Marguerite as lady of sorrow.

Coming together in this piece, then, are multiple factors that help in understanding music of this type: the large body of personal devotional prayer like texts found in Books of Hours; the deep immersive experience of devotion; the widespread practice of devotions in rooms outside the main church; the use of the role of indulgences for concern of one’s afterlife; Mary as intercessor and also as one to be adored in her own right; the use of images and vision in devotion; how the manner in which this prayer was to be prayed was illuminated in the paintings on the manuscript; how theology could be embedded in a text.

All this helps delineate the parameters of a musical performance. Smaller rooms, from the private chamber that the illustration of Marguerite depicts to the lavish and rich chapels of major courts, having less reverberation than many major churches, provide an acoustical setting that would favor great clarity of line and detail in the polyphony. Both

the intimacy of space and great seriousness of purpose we sense probably also favor attention to the perfection of performance of line, nuance, and intonation. Today we do not know what kind of sound was interpreted at that time to support meditative environment, but we have our own ideas today that provide guidance.

The prayer motets, though not a strict genre, include many of the masterpieces of polyphony especially from the later 1400s, including many much more complex works by Josquin and others, and they seem to share a similar nature.

***Salve Regina* (4 voice) – Josquin des Prez (c.1450/55-1521)**

Salve Regina was one of the best known chants of the era. It was the earliest of the Marian antiphons to be added to the close of Compline at the end of each day. When the other three Marian antiphons were assigned to this position during specific portions of the church year, *Salve Regina* was maintained as the end-of-day chant for the long post-Pentecost season. In some locales, especially in the Low Countries, the singing of the *Salve Regina* was extended into a larger musical devotion called Salve services. There are many polyphonic settings.

The chant melody itself is very beautiful and distinctive. It has the unusually large range of an 11th. The highest pitches occur with the words “turn your merciful eyes to us”. The lowest pitches set “and Jesus, the blessed fruit of your womb.” With broad arches overall, singing the melody truly elicits an expressive performance as it gradually rises to the highest notes, in its slow descent to the lower notes, and in the lovely final phrases on *O Clemens: O pia: O dulcis Virgo Maria*.

Figure 2. Marian antiphon *Salve Regina*.

Sal - ve, *Re - gi - na, ma - ter mi - se - ri - cor - di - ae: Vi - ta, dul -
Hail, Queen, Mother of mercy, Our life,
- ce - do, et spes nos - tra, sal - ve. Ad - te cla - ma - mus, ex - su - les, fi - li -
our sweetness and our hope, hail To you we cry, banished children
i He - vae Ad - te sus - pi - ra - mus, ge - men - tes et flen - tes in hac la - cri -
of Eve. To you we sigh, mourning and weeping in this
ma - rum val - le. E - ia er - go, Ad - vo - ca - ta nos - tra, il - los tu - os mi -
valley of tears. Turn then, our advocate, to us
se - ri - cor - des o - cu - los ad nos con - ver - te. Et Je - sum be - ne - di -
your eyes of mercy turn And Jesus, blessed
cum fru - tum ven - tris tu - i, no - bis post hoc ex - si - li - um os - ten - de.
fruit of your womb, to us after this our exile show
O cle - mens: O pi - a: O
O clement, O loving, O
(o) dul - cis Vir - go Ma - ri - a
sweet Virgin Mary

Josquin's 4-voice setting, made up of two strict 2-voice canons, is a compositional tour-de-force. One canon is in the upper two voices at the fourth, the other canon in the lower two voices at the fourth. The chant is paraphrased in the alto, which is followed in canon by the soprano. In some passages the two canons merge into what seems like one shared texture; the piece is articulated into many short phrases by frequent cadences. The effect of these many phrases, which rise quickly and subside, is like a kind of imploring, which would be in keeping with the imploring nature of the text. Josquin's five-voice setting of *Salve Regina* also conveys an imploring feeling as the quinta vox repeats over and over the opening four notes of the chant, those for the word *Salve*. Josquin's four-voice setting matches well the general emotive outlines and arches one has when singing the melody alone, especially when the chant tessitura and emotion of the text reaches their highest.

Josquin also makes effective use of the distinctive opening three notes of the chant. The chant begins on the fifth degree, descends a major second, then rises a major second to return to the opening pitch. This pattern or its inversion is very frequently used as new phrases begin or within cadences, and helps give a consistency to the imploring nature of the phrase sections.

Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
ad te clamamus
exsules filii Hevae,
ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve;
to thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us;
and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb,
Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

The presence of the double canon raises the question about whether there is some symbolic meaning in how Josquin chose to build this piece. The analyses by musicologists such as Craig Wright, Willem Elders, and others of many works from the Middle Ages that use contrapuntal devices often uncover some purpose for techniques like canon, retrograde, inversion, etc. However, another reason for finely-wrought construction can be quite simply the beauty of the craft itself.

This setting does not seem to suggest any particular symbolic purpose for using the double canon. This writer sent communications to two experts in the field of Marian musical studies, Craig Wright of Yale University and David Rothenberg of Case Western, and they also could find no symbolic meaning in this choice. Rothenberg did

point out that a rule understood in the Middle Ages was that the more beautifully something was made which was offered to Mary, the more she would appreciate this. Like a carefully crafted painting, a sculpture, precious gems, or metalwork, the craft itself is of value in Mary's eyes, while simultaneously Josquin provides an emotionally effective setting of a text in which people in need cry to Mary for aid.

***Victimae paschali laudes* – Josquin des Prez**

This piece is a fascinating example of musical symbolism. Josquin unites two secular chanson melodies with the sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* in ways that draw extra meaning from all.

Victimae paschali laudes, the sequence for Easter day, lends itself to dramatic treatment because the text contains a dialogue, and in many churches while it was sung the singers would adopt certain character roles and act out the sepulcher scene of Easter morning. In one typical example, three solo singers who represent the three women who went to the tomb take turns singing the opening verses up to the question *Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti in via?* (Tell us Mary [Magdelene], what did you see on the way?), then a singer representing Mary would sing the answer: “[I saw] the tomb of the living Christ....”

An extended section of the Ordinal of service logistics in use during Ockeghem's time at Sainte-Chapelle shows another example of the dramatization of the *Victimae paschali* sequence, and also demonstrates how detailed the instructions for Masses and other services could be.

On *Easter Sunday*, the cantor and a canon are responsible for the choir, but two helpers assist them with Matins, either canons or chaplains. The four recite the invitatory; the choir recites the ps. All ans. of the nocturns and Lauds are 'sine pneumatate'. Arsenal 114 gives instructions for the *Visitatio sepulchri*: After R9 *Et valde mane*, v. *Et respicientes*, *Gloria* and *repetendum*, the choirboys and helpers intone the R. *Et valde mane* again.

When they finish it, the three Marys, with their faces partially covered, chant 'voce submissa et humili' under the existing organs (*subtus organa existentes*). Then they process to the main choir of the chapel in order, that is, the first Mary: *Prima sabbati*, the second *Secundum versum* and the third *Tertium super*, and when they have crossed through the assembled crowd and reach the entrance to the choir, they chant in unison (*in simul et una voces implici*) the an. *O Deus quos revolvit*.

Then the two angel guards of the tomb, one at the head and the other at the foot of it, invite the Marys by chanting the ans. *Venite, venite* and *Nolite timere vos*. Then the Marys approach the angels, and the angels chant in unison *Quem queritis in sepulchro, O christicole*.

The Marys answer the angels *Ihesum Nazarenum crucifixum, O celicole*, then the angels reply *Non est hic. Surrexit sicut predixit. Ite nunciate quia surrexit*. Next the Marys go to the tomb and knock, one after another, and the second Mary receives the shroud and leaves with it. **Then all turn to face the choir and the first Mary recites alone *Victime paschali* the second *Agnus redemit* and the third *Mors et vita*. The cantor recites to them, looking backward, *Dic nobis Maria*, then the first Mary responds alone *Sepulchrum Christi viventis* and points to it with her finger, and the second Mary alone recites the vs. *Angelicos testes* just after the first Mary. She waves the shroud she is holding to their witnesses and leaves with it in her hand. Then the third woman alone recites the entire v. *Surrexit Christus spes nostra*, the other choirboy chants the entire v. *Credendum est magis*, the entire choir recites the entire v. *Scimus Christum surrexisse*, and next the soldiers rise and rejoice to their satisfaction.** Now the boys recite *Adest dies* etc. And when this is finished, the bishop or treasurer intones the *Te Deum* 'alta voce' and 'sine neupmate'. The *Benedictus* an. of Lauds is also 'sine neupmate'.

At the Easter mass, four canons recite the alleluia v. *Pascha ostrum*.³⁵
[paragraphs and bold added]

Josquin's setting is for four voices, and the piece is divided into two parts. The first uses the opening verses, which praise Christ. The second part begins with the question which asks Mary what she saw: *Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti via?*

³⁵ Barbara Haggh, "An Ordinal of Ockeghem's Time from the Sainte-Chapelle of Paris: Paris, Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal, MS 114," *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*, D. 47ste, Afl. 1ste/2de, [Johannes Ockeghem] (Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 1997): 46.

The lower three voices trade off phrases of the *Victimae* cantus firmus, sometimes overlapping entrances and occasionally engaging in brief imitation of the cantus firmus. The writing is active and vigorous.

The superius is given a meaningful treatment. During the Middle Ages a symbolic association was seen between the language used in adoration of the Virgin Mary and the verses of courtly love poetry. Both kinds of expression shared certain idealistic, noble, and chaste sentiments. Further, the separation between the sacred and secular was not nearly as distinct as it was later felt to be. A secular melody could be chosen to be included in a sacred piece because of some shared relationship and concept between the texts.

Late medieval culture was so thoroughly permeated by Christian symbolism that there could be neither ‘an object nor an action, however trivial, that [was] not constantly correlated with Christ or salvation’ (Huizinga 1924, 136)... Particularly in the case of a sacred musical work based on a widely-transmitted and demonstrably popular chanson tenor, the choice of cantus firmus may be shown to have been predicated upon the suitability of its original text as a vernacular gloss upon the sacred Latin text of the new work.”³⁶

For example, Josquin’s setting of the *Stabat mater* incorporates the tenor from Binchois’ well-known chanson *Comme femme desconfortée*, creating a link between the text of the sorrowing mother of Christ and the sad woman of the chanson. (Binchois’ tenor was used in other motets and masses by composers including Agricola, Ghiselin, Isaac, and Senfl, and in most of these cases the

³⁶ Long, “Symbol and Ritual in Josquin’s ‘Missa Di Dadi’,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 1.

usage is with a Marian emphasis.³⁷) Michael Long discusses how Josquin used the tenor of Morton's rondeau *N'aray je jamais mieulx que j'ay* as a spiritually symbolic entity in the Mass *Di Dadi*.³⁸ In *Victimae paschal laudes* Josquin makes use of two well-known chanson melodies, each of which were used often as cantus firmi and had already received specific religious associations by Josquin's time.³⁹

This work is divided into two parts. The superius of the first part sings the exact melody of Ockeghem's chanson *D'ung aultre amer*. Its placement in the top voice makes it extremely audible and clear. This chanson refers to a lover who is male, and how it would be a dishonor to love any but him. These verses, which symbolically mirror Christ, are matched to those of the first section of the *Victimae paschal* text, which praises Christ, the innocent victim who has redeemed his sheep.

³⁷ Rothenberg, 295.

³⁸ Long, 12.

³⁹ Rothenberg, 240.

Figure 3. Josquin des Prez, motet *Victimae paschali laudes*, beginning of part 1

To the paschal victim let Christians sing praise

Vic - ti - me pas - cha - li lau - des im - mo - lent Chris - ti - a - ni A - gnus re - de - mit o - ves, Chris - tus

The Lamb has redeemed the sheep,

10 15

lau - des des Chris - tus
Christ, innocent of the Father,

Figure 4. Johannes Ockeghem, chanson *D'un aultre amer*

D'un aultre a - mer mon cuer s'a bes - se - roit;

Chanson translation:

To love another, my heart would be debased.
It should not be thought that I estrange myself from him,
nor that anything would change me in this regard,
for my honor would be diminished.

The second part of the piece uses Ghizeghem's chanson *De tous bien plaine* in the superius, another well-known chanson that had Marian connotations and speaks of a "mistress full of all goodness" who should be honored. The

second part opens with a duo between bass and altus asking the question “Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way?” The superius, with the chanson melody, enters when Mary begins her answer, “The tomb of the living Christ and the glory of his rising.”⁴⁰

Figure 5. Josquin, *Victimae paschali laudes*, beginning of part 2.

50 55

S
T1
T2
B

Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way?
Dic no - bis Ma - ri - a, quid vi - dis - ti in vi -

60 The tomb of the living Christ 65 , and the glory of his rising

S
T1
T2
B

Se - pul - crum Chris - ti vi - ven - tis et glo - ri - am
a? Se - pul - crum Chris - ti vi - ven - tis et glo - ri - am vi -
a?

Figure 6. Heyne, *De tous biens plaine* melody.

Chanson translation:

My mistress is full of all goodness.
Everyone should honor her,
for she is as full of worth
as ever was any goddess.

⁴⁰ See Rothenberg, 244-250.

In the Biblical account, this Mary of course is Mary Magdalene, but the language of the chanson is the kind used to honor the Virgin Mary, and at that time the very common legend that Christ had appeared to his mother before anyone else after the resurrection allows the Virgin to be represented in this composition, or at least permits the idea being heard in the chanson melody to be given Marian association. Josquin's use of a chanson with definite association with the Virgin Mary clearly defines which Mary is implied here.⁴¹

***Nigra sum* – Michael Praetorius (1571? - 1621)**

The connection between a setting from the Song of Songs by the “arch-Protestant” (Blume) Praetorius and devotions to the Virgin Mary may be tenuous. Praetorius composed at a time when Latin texts were still widely set to music for use in German Protestant services, and also when Latin compositions by German Protestants found use in Catholic services.

Praetorius' setting comes from his published volume *Musarum Sioniarum motectae et psalmi latini* (1607). Virtually all of Praetorius' music was published by him very systematically in volumes according to type: hymn harmonizations, chorale concertos, motets, etc. The *Motectae* is one of only two volumes (from a total of 20) setting Latin texts. His preface indicates that the pieces were probably composed about five years prior to their publication, placing them within the very beginning of his very productive career and well before his published music had

⁴¹ Rothenberg, 250.

been profoundly influenced by Italian concertato principles. These Latin motets clearly show his working out and borrowing of models such as motets of Lassus and Palestrina or late Renaissance Italian madrigals, and though these are early among his publications, these are very fine and effective pieces and show that he had mastered the techniques found therein.

The Christian church interpreted the Song of Songs allegorically, either as a reflection of the love between Christ and the church or between Christ and Mary, and some musical settings can be interpreted either way. *Nigra sum*, from the first chapter of the Song of Songs, bears inescapable connections to Marian traditions. It was set many times during the middle ages and Renaissance, and is prominent in the Vespers to the Blessed Virgin.

Praetorius' setting does not provide obvious clues to any particular interpretation. In fact, the piece seems closer to a sacred madrigal than a traditional motet: it abounds in word painting, with each phrase of text being given its own new musical setting. Praetorius' choice of verses from the chapter is also unusual. Few if any other settings of *Nigra sum* include verse 7 (*Indica mihi...*), though many Renaissance composers chose various verses from this chapter in their own settings beginning with *nigra sum*.

Nigra sum sed formosa,
o filiae Jerusalem:
Nolite me considerare quod sum nigra,
Quia coloravit sol:
Indica mihi, quem diligit anima mea.
Ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie,
Ne vagari incipiam post greges sodalium
tuorum. *Song of Songs 1:5,6a,7*

I am dark but beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem:
Do not consider me dark,
I have been colored by the sun.
Show me, you who are loved by my soul,
Where you feed, where you lie at midday, lest
I begin to wander after the flocks of your
companions.

It may be, then, that this piece is a non-committal setting purely of textual ideas, which could be interpreted in different ways according to the leanings of those who hear it, just as Praetorius' harmonization of *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* is heard by Protestants as referring to Christ and by today's Catholics as referring to Mary. It further serves as one example of the very large shift that took place between the symbolically conceived music of earlier periods and the rhetorical and word-based writing of the later Renaissance and early Baroque. Mention should be made of the word-painting of the words *formosa* (beautiful), the darkness of *sum nigra* the long descent on the words *ubi cubes in meridie* (where you lie at midday), and the rather coy scampering on *Ne vagari incipiam* (lest I begin to wander.)

***Regina caeli* – Orlando Lasso (c.1532-1594)**

The Marian antiphon *Regina caeli* was heard during the church year from Easter Sunday until Pentecost. It has a short text of four lines, each line ending with *alleluia*. The word *alleluia* was not heard during the entire preceding Lenten season, and in polyphonic settings the *alleluia* is given special emphasis.

Regina caeli laetare, alleluia:	Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia,
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia:	For he whom you were worthy to bear, alleluia,
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia:	Has risen, as he said, alleluia,
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.	Pray for us to God, alleluia.

For each of the four main Marian antiphons there is a simplified version, and in this setting Lasso chose the simpler (LU278) as the cantus firmus for this

6-voice work. The melody is easily heard in long notes as it serves as the theme for the four major points of imitation corresponding to the four lines of the text. His setting of the four alleluias is grand and sweeping.

Overall, Lasso's works cover an extreme range of expressiveness and it is natural that a piece such as this *Regina caeli* would be conveyed with late Renaissance power. Within the Catholic world, however, this was the period of the Counter Reformation. It cannot be said whether Lasso's large setting of this text reflects a changed set of emphases as to how the church expressed the meaning of Mary⁴², but at least this grand work is not incompatible with how the church wished to focus on Mary as an example of its power.

Following the Council of Trent (1564) the church responded to reformers' criticisms through internal reform, but it also responded to the outside world in a much more aggressive manner, which included its depiction of Mary.

In general, the Catholic church responded to the Protestant threat by developing a more militant piety. Central to this development was an expansion of the earlier High Renaissance revival of triumphal imagery to express the absolute, all-conquering power of the papacy, the Roman Church, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the Virgin as Queen of Heaven, the saints, the "True Faith", and the cross, redefined as a standard of victory.⁴³

Whether Lasso meant to convey something like this idea cannot be known. His Marian antiphon settings in general are grand and may reflect the importance in

⁴² James Haar, "(1) Orlande [Roland] de Lassus [Orlando di Lasso]," Grove Music Online, <http://libproxy.uncg.edu:4733/subscriber/article/grove/music/16063pg1?q=lasso&search=quick&pos=3&start=1#firsthit> (accessed October 3, 2009).

⁴³ Robert Baldwin, "The Impact of the Counter-Reformation on Art: Baroque Art in Catholic Europe (Italy, France, Belgium)," *Social History of Art*. <http://www.socialhistoryofart/essaysbyperiod.htm> (accessed Dec. 18, 2009).

which we know they were held at the Bavarian court, just as his settings of Epistle texts tend to be more devotional.⁴⁴ But whether a statement about the Counter Reformation church itself or not, this is a piece of exuberance and joy celebrating Easter and the Queen of Heaven in an age when music expressed ideas in a way that was more overt and rhetorical than symbolic, when the text itself (plus concepts of construction based on principles of rhetoric) is conveyed, and reliance on symbolic meanings from *cantus firmi*, devices, or textual associations have become less used.

⁴⁴ Haar, "Lassus."

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the nature of sacred devotion to the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and Renaissance and has examined compositions showing ways in which this was expressed in music. This music naturally shares characteristics of other music of its own time. What makes these pieces suitable for Marian devotion may be seen in symbolic texts, in ardent craftsmanship, and in musical symbolism. Musical expression becomes freer and more overt as one progresses through this period, and often the nature of the text itself serves as a primary guide for performance.

With the devotional or prayer motet, such as the fine example of *Ave sanctissima Maria* by La Rue, we have an interesting situation when various pieces of non-musical evidence can come together to reveal the context of devotional practice, which then reflects back upon the music with implications for its performance and effect. This personal kind of motet includes many of the foremost compositions of the age, especially into the later 1400s when the middle class and wealthy sought greater control over their spiritual destinies, when chapels and choirs in churches and courts were given greater attention, and when there was a very large increase in the composition of sacred motets, many intended for private devotions. It should be understood that the seven compositions examined here were also chosen for use in a lecture-recital. The works had to be learned in little rehearsal time and fit time limits. In general these seven works are shorter and

simpler than the average. Better known compositions like Josquin's *Virgo prudentissima* or *Inviolata* may be more representative but were too long or complex for current purposes.

Prayer motets by Josquin and others are often major works of great beauty and complex craft. The chapels where the private devotions were held could range from the simple to the lavish chapels of the wealthy or at court. Motets were probably not in the province of the poor, and thus the kind of location for these pieces is the larger ornate chapels, which themselves often have a lovely acoustic.

Howard Meyer Brown made a pertinent comment about how the physical setting of smaller performance space could set off the beauties of polyphony: "...[this] may also explain one of the problems I have always had in imagining the sound of detailed and intricate Renaissance polyphony in the overly resonant acoustics of vast cathedrals."⁴⁵

Anyone who has attempted singing polyphony in a large cathedral with more than a few singers on a part would tend to agree with Brown. Further, in a smaller space without "overly resonant acoustics," not only can the lines be heard, but the more moderate reverberation becomes part of the singers' aesthetic instrument. Singers naturally focus on how to send tone into such a space and shape it, and attention is drawn to the details.

Therefore, one of the most valuable results of this study is that it helps us understand the performance context of the major category of motet referred to as prayer motet, a category that may have been the dominant type during the later 1400s. Knowing

⁴⁵ Brown: 757.

such things as the music's physical surroundings and spiritual goals provide at the very least a subliminal effect on how to approach performance. It can sometimes be difficult to know how to "place" early sacred music, and information surrounding any early piece is valuable. With the prayer motet, the smaller, beautiful space, the immersive state of mind and soul desired, and the great seriousness of intent imply performance of great clarity, detail, intimacy, and perfection, heading in the opposite direction from large church music.

It is perilous to generalize or attempt to categorize sacred music from a period with a shared set of compositional techniques and a repertoire of such flexibility, but the information being considered here may support one broad distinction. On one end of the spectrum are large architectural, sweeping works. Composers like Isaac, Obrecht, and Lasso wrote certain large polyphonic masses and motets that rise and loft into towering arches. Works of this kind have an "outward" manner and demand space. On the other hand, if we consider devotional motets in a smaller space, the approach that may work best is "inward," where the refinement, detail, and beauty of ensemble (among other elements) support the experience. Such qualities are also compatible with their reverent texts. Another perilous simile: in some cases, "outward" public pieces have an impact not unlike a vast fresco, while private works are like small perfectly crafted art objects that have meaning in amazing small details, beautiful gems, and precious metalwork.

To say the following greatly oversimplifies the case, but it is important for a conductor to see if a composition can be found to have any nature such as those described (or yet another), and to allow this to enter performance. Too often early sacred music can

be given the same generic sweetness, but this music is diverse and is as purposeful as it is aesthetic. Even among the seven pieces discussed here, of which only one could be called a prayer motet, the range of expression is vast, from serene chant to the fierceness of Josquin's *Victimae paschali laudes* and the grandeur of Lasso's *Regina Caeli*, from the early medieval objectivity of Perotin to the tenderness of La Rue.

A work's nature and a reflection of its purpose, if these can be determined, should be some part of its performance. This is especially important when this music is performed in a concert hall, far removed from its original context. Early sacred music was part of a broader setting in which all senses and the mind and soul were deeply targeted. This music certainly can stand on its own on a concert stage, but is enhanced by a richer acoustical setting and a visually rich environment such as in beautiful churches.

In all early sacred music, the very singing of all this music should strive for the same high level of craft and refinement that its composers applied in writing it, and may help explain the extremely high standards that were expected of singers. This is ensemble music of the highest order.

We do not know what kind of musical sound during the Middle Ages conveyed concepts like gentle, prayerful, or grand, and a choice must be made about our approach to sound today. One way is to strive for authentic sound by learning everything available and making an estimate; the other is to try to understand the purpose of a piece and then match the sound to what we today consider will evoke that psychological or emotional state. We should learn what we can, and it is true that surprising and convincing revelations can come with experimentation. At the same time, this music's life is both its

beauty and its purpose, and for it to have any meaning today some kind of translation into modern concepts is often advisable.

Conductors today should consider all aspects that can be known or assumed for an early sacred work and determine if performance is made more meaningful by seeing the piece within some kind of plausible context, and making specific decisions about the character and purpose of individual compositions.

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