

GABRIELE GIACOMELLI

An unpublished mass by Marco da Gagliano  
and its ‘disordered beauties’

Ever since Emil Vogel’s historic biographical essay of 1889,<sup>1</sup> Marco da Gagliano (Firenze, 1582 – *ibid.* 1643) has always been identified essentially as the composer of *Dafne*, the opera commissioned for the Gonzaga-Savoia wedding (then postponed) of 1607, or, at most, also of *Flora* (for the Farnese-Medici wedding of 1628). Admittedly some attention has also been given to the six books of five-voice madrigals, especially by Einstein, Butchart and Strainchamps.<sup>2</sup> But if we consider Gagliano’s duties as *maestro di cappella* at Santa Maria del Fiore, the cathedral of Florence (1608-1643), and then at the chapel of the grand-duke of Tuscany, which induced him to compose mainly a large amount of sacred music, we find that most of his work is still utterly unknown. This huge production – only a minimal part of which was actually printed – consists of compositions belonging to the most varied typologies ranging from the mass and motet to the responsory and hymn. Moreover, in the absence of a proper census of that *corpus* (which can hardly be carried out until the catalogues of the musical archives of the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore and the Florentine church of S. Lorenzo have been completed) it is also impossible to establish with any precision the full nature of that corpus. In the meantime, we must restrict ourselves to recording individual musicological rescue operations (and related concert performances), which date at least to the early 1980s, when Mario Fabbri edited a facsimile reprint of the *Responsori della Settimana Santa* for four equal voices.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, however, we witnessed the first performance in modern times of a mass for six voices in Santa Maria del Fiore in 1997 during the first year of the concert series *O flos colende. Musica sacra a Firenze*, an annual event that has also unearthed many other pieces by the same composer, in part

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<sup>1</sup> See EMIL VOGEL, “Marco da Gagliano. Zur Geschichte des florentiner Musiklebens von 1570-1650”, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, V, 1889, pp. 396-442 and 509-568.

<sup>2</sup> See ALFRED EINSTEIN, *The Italian Madrigal*, 3 vols., Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1949, II, pp. 729-742 (repr. 1971); DAVID S. BUTCHART, *I madrigali di Marco da Gagliano*, Firenze, Olschki, 1982; EDMOND STRAINCHAMPS, “Theory as Polemic: Mutio Effrem’s *Censure... sopra il sesto libro de madrigali di Marco da Gagliano*”, in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 189-216.

<sup>3</sup> See MARCO DA GAGLIANO, *Responsori della settimana santa a 4 voci pari*, Venezia, Bartolomeo Magni, 1630; facsimile reprint of these edition Bologna, Forni, 1982 (with introductory notes by Mario Fabbri).

published in the anthology of the same name.<sup>4</sup> It is on this mass – not to be confused with the mass for the same forces published in the 1614 collection<sup>5</sup> – that I wish to focus my attention here, also in consideration of the very recent recording on compact disc.<sup>6</sup> In its stylistic features it is fully characteristic of the particular cultural and artistic environment of the Florentine chapel, and undoubtedly it represents one of the high points of Florentine musical production in the 17th century. But before tackling the stylistic issues, I would first like to examine certain problems of a philological nature concerning the attribution and dating of the composition.

This mass survives solely in manuscript II-18 (fols. 89-105) of the Archivio Musicale of the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence. It can be securely added to the catalogue of Gagliano's works, thanks to documentary evidence related to the manuscript. Our first evidence is the attribution that appears on the page carrying the manuscript's table of contents, where we read: "Messa a sei di M. M. a c. 89", an abbreviation that can be filled out as M[esser] M[arco] (da Gagliano). In fact the same codex includes many other works by Gagliano, all attributed to him by the same abbreviation. Indeed the first of these pieces is ascribed even more explicitly to "M. Marco" (the six-voice mass published in 1614, cited in the table immediately before the mass which concerns us here), from which we infer that all the compositions successively identified by the more laconic "M. M." were evidently meant to refer to the same person.

Moreover, thanks to the annotations contained in certain 17th-century inventories, it is possible to reconstruct at least part of the manuscript's history until its definitive structuring, and to establish conclusively the paternity of the mass, though we are still left in the dark over the date and the occasion for which it was composed. The earliest of these valuable inventories<sup>7</sup> was drawn up on 15 March 1651 when Giovanni Cilandri (heir of the deceased *maestro di cappella* Giovanni Battista da Gagliano, Marco's younger brother) handed over to the *provveditore* of the Opera some music books that had formerly belonged to the musical archive of

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<sup>4</sup> See *O flos colende. Musica per Santa Maria del Fiore (1608-1788)*, ed. Gabriele Giacomelli and Francesco Luisi, Roma, Torre d'Orfeo, 1998. It includes the eight-voice mass for double choir and the motets *Iubilare Deo* and *Elisabeth Zachariae*.

<sup>5</sup> See *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales, A/I*, Kassel-Basel-Tours-London, Bärenreiter, 1971-81 (hereafter RISM) G 105.

<sup>6</sup> See MARCO DA GAGLIANO, *Missa in Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, Insieme vocale e strumentale L'Homme Armé, directed by Fabio Lombardo, Tactus TC 580701, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> See Firenze, Archivio di Santa Maria del Fiore (hereafter I-Fd), V-3-30, n. 1.

the cathedral.<sup>8</sup> Our codex is here identified by the number 21 and described as follows: “Un libro manuscritto con coperta verde, introiti, messe e mottetti di c. 78 e sono compositioni di messer Marco da Gagliano”. That this indeed refers to our manuscript is also confirmed by the fact the former call number “XXI” is still legible on the flyleaf, above the more recent “18”. The fact that the codex now consists of 116 folios, instead of the original 78, is explained by the addition – made after 1659, when it still began with the present fol. 38 bearing the Introit (*Puer natus est nobis*) *Et filius datus est*, as attested in the inventory drawn up in 1657<sup>9</sup> – of a group of sheets containing the pieces that now precede the Christmas Introit, including Palestrina’s *Gabriel archangelus* mass. Here, therefore, is the description of the manuscript given in the inventory drawn up on 7 April 1661, after the additions were made:

21. Un libro manuscritto coperta verde messa del Palestina sino a c. 20, bianco sino a c. 36 et a c. 37 [recte 38] *Et filius datus est nobis*, e altri mottetti, e messa, altri mottetti, altra messa Magnificat Verbum caro. Et Dies irae opere di messer Marco da Gagliano sino 114.

All things considered, it is clear therefore that the original section of the manuscript – which belonged to the private collection of Giovanni Battista da Gagliano – is that corresponding to the present fols. 38-116, which also include the mass in question (in the inventory only 114 folia are counted, given that the last two are without music).

As for the musical works contained, an interesting attestation of their value is the opinion expressed in September 1651 by the *sottomaestro* Giovanni Battista Comparini, who considered them “useful for the chapel because the compositions were good, and the masters famous”, and thus

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<sup>8</sup> Giovanni Battista da Gagliano, who had died on 8 January of the same year, had in fact never received an official nomination to the post of *maestro di cappella*, even though he had carried out all of its functions with respective pay ever since the period when his brother Marco still held the post but did not perform his duties because of poor health. On the history of the chapel and its musicians in the 17th century, see *O flos colende*, in particular the Chronology and respective *Regesto*. The inventories, complete and with comments, are published in GABRIELE GIACOMELLI, “Palestrina nel repertorio musicale della cattedrale di Firenze (1638-1677)”, in *La recezione di Palestrina in Europa fino all’Ottocento*, ed. Rodobaldo Tibaldi, Lucca, LIM, 1999, pp. 105-126 and in Id., “Due granduchi in cent’anni (1621-1723): continuità e tradizione nel repertorio della cappella musicale”, in *Cantate Domino. Musica nei secoli per il Duomo di Firenze*, Proceedings of the international congress (Firenze, 23-25 May 1997), ed. Piero Gargiulo, Gabriele Giacomelli and Carolyn Gianturco, Firenze, Edifir, 2001, pp. 195-218.

<sup>9</sup> See I-Fd, V-1-19, pp. 84-95.

decided in favour of the purchase of the manuscript by the Opera.<sup>10</sup>

The most challenging and interesting composition of the group is precisely the mass, a work that also reveals Gagliano's secure knowledge and profound assimilation of the polyphonic style of the Palestrina school. Documentary evidence of his admiration for the *princeps musicae* is given by his very own request, advanced in August 1638, for a book of his masses "which must serve for the Chapel".<sup>11</sup> The beginning of the Kyrie is therefore an exemplary instance of a contrapuntal doctrine that was solid, yet anything but scholastic (Ex. 1).

Though the Gregorian origin of the subject in the 1st mode is evident enough, for its identification I can at present only advance a few conjectures. From an examination of the chant-books preserved in the Archivio musicale of the Opera del Duomo in Florence I found a particularly significant resemblance to the well-known antiphon to the Magnificat *Virgo prudentissima* for the first Vespers of the feast of Mary's Assumption. The version given below, transmitted in Manuscript H 8 (datable to the end of the 16th century), is identical (at least as far as the incipit is concerned) to that commonly known and given in the books of current usage (including the *Liber Usualis*); and is also recognised in the polyphonic composition of the same name composed by Giovanni Maria Casini, organist of Santa Maria del Fiore, almost a century later (Ex. 2).<sup>12</sup>

However, a similar melody is also found in the incipit of two other antiphons that are more important than the above, both belonging to the corpus of Easter chants.<sup>13</sup> They are *Pueri Hebraeorum portantes* and *Pueri Hebraeorum vestimenta*, chants for the ceremony of the distribution of the

<sup>10</sup> See I-Fd, II-2-20, p. 216. As well as the two masses by Gagliano the manuscript also includes some motets, among which *Ne timeas Maria* (also included in the 1614 collection), attributed to the same composer also in the manuscript of Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, *Archivio di S. Lorenzo*, ms II-5.

<sup>11</sup> See I-Fd, IV-2-29, n. 261; a document recently published in GIACOMELLI, "Palestrina nel repertorio", p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> A modern edition of the polyphonic motet, which the composer included in the *Moduli quatuor vocibus* op. I (Roma, Mascardo, 1706), is now available in *O flos colende*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>13</sup> A similar melodic tradition is attested in certain Mantuan and Cremonese chant-books, to which Marc'Antonio Ingegneri must have resorted for his motet *Pueri Hebraeorum portantes*, as evidenced in PAOLA BESUTTI, "Ricorrenze motiviche nella produzione musicale sacra di area cremonese fra Cinque e Seicento", in *Marc'Antonio Ingegneri e la musica a Cremona nel secondo Cinquecento*, Proceedings of the day of studies (Cremona, 27 November 1992), ed. by Antonio Delfino and Maria Teresa Rosa Barezzi, Lucca, LIM, 1995, pp. 15-23: 19. Further sporadic similarities can be identified in other melodies copied in the cathedral chant-books, but since they belong to chants of utterly secondary importance (which, in any case, are quite likely to have modelled their melodic profiles on earlier models), I feel that their use as the subject of an important polyphonic *Ordinarium* is improbable.

holy branches on Palm Sunday. In this case, the reading transmitted by the cathedral's chant-books differs from the more generally known melody given in the books of current usage. In fact, in manuscript D 2. 21 (drawn up in the 16th century, like manuscript F 30, where the second antiphon only is copied, on fol. CXXXV) the incipit for both antiphons differs from the traditional version, above all by the absence of the opening D (Ex. 3 and 4).

As for the polyphonic versions of these texts transmitted in the cathedral manuscripts, it is interesting to note the presence of subjects comparable both to the reading of the cathedral chant-books and to the much more common reading, which however appears in only two compositions, both anonymous. These two works are the *Pueri Hebraeorum vestimenta* copied into manuscript II-45 (immediately following a *Pueri Hebraeorum portantes* with a tenor taken instead from the chant-books) and the *Pueri Hebraeorum portantes* copied into manuscript II-13, in both cases sources that date to the mid 16th century.<sup>14</sup> The former piece is in a contrapuntal style that is awkward and somewhat archaic, not only compared to Gagliano's mass – with which it has nothing in common except the resemblance of the subject – but also compared to the polyphonic works, generally of a much higher standard, by Francesco Corteccia, *maestro di cappella* at the time when the manuscript, which also contains many of his works, was drawn up (Ex. 5). Nor does the second piece have anything in common with the mass, except for a resemblance to the subject with which the two upper voices begin. In this case, however, the contrapuntal style is much more mature than in the previous work, and one could even conjecture an attribution to Corteccia himself, a composer well represented in the codex (Ex. 6).

Gagliano's mass cannot, therefore, be considered as a parody of the anonymous *Pueri*.<sup>15</sup> So leaving unresolved the secure identification of the

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<sup>14</sup> For the chronology, see above all FRANK A. D'ACCONE, "Updating the Style: Francesco Corteccia's Revisions in His Responsories for Holy Week", in *Music and Context. Essays for John M. Ward*, ed. Anne Dhu Shapiro, Harvard, Harvard University, 1985, pp. 32-53 and *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music 1400-1550*, American Institute of Musicology, Hänssler, 1979, I pp. 238 and 241.

<sup>15</sup> A fair number of manuscripts of the cathedral transmit a *Pueri Hebraeorum portantes*, this time attributable with a reasonable degree of security to Luca Bati, Corteccia's successor as head of the cappella and teacher of Gagliano (see above all FRANK A. D'ACCONE, "The Sources of Luca Bati's Sacred Music at the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore", in *Altro polo. Essays on Italian Music in the Cinquecento*, ed. Richard Charteris, Sydney, Frederick May Foundation for Italian Studies, 1990, pp. 159-177). Of the six voices that constitute the piece's forces, that of Canto II, partially imitated by Alto, begins with a subject that could be construed as an embellished paraphrase of the chant of the same title (though certain significant notes, particularly the low C, are missing). But this is surely too little to justify considering the piece as a model for the mass.

subject (though limiting it to two alternatives, both plausible), I will now move on to examine issues of a stylistic nature and attempt to place the work more precisely in the particular cultural context of the Florentine chapel's tradition, of which indeed this mass stands as one of the most important examples in this period.

What is immediately observed is how the composition style complies fully with that of the late 16th century. The absence of any instrumental contribution, even of a continuo part (though obviously we cannot rule out the possibility that a simple *basso seguente* was added by the organ in performance), is a feature shared with the other pieces included both in the 1614 edition and, more generally, in the entire corpus of manuscripts of the Archivio musicale of the Opera del Duomo in Florence dating to the same period. But what distinguishes this mass is the prominence of its smooth singable melodic lines (of Gregorian derivation, as we noted above), which the composer takes pains not to contaminate with the idiomatic features of the contemporary instrumental repertory. In fact, what is completely lacking is a recourse to any rhythmic figurations other than those commonly used, for example, in the Palestrina repertory. As for the choice of intervals, again there are very few exceptions to the rules of strict counterpoint, which in Florence were still the object of study and veneration in the mid 17th century by a number of important musicians. It was one of Gagliano's contemporaries and fellow-citizens, the Vallumbrosan monk Severo Bonini (also a member, since 1607, of the Accademia degli Elevati that Gagliano himself founded), who complained of the trend followed by the composers of his age, guilty of "giving a kick to the rules of Zarlino".<sup>16</sup> In fact the writings of that great theorist constituted the main point of reference for musical composition, and the immortal compositions of Palestrina were assigned the role of *exempla* against which every composer should, at the very least, compare his own. Bonini admired them as "works that indeed will always be a school for all contrapuntalists, of such a supreme study and art that this singular master can truly be likened in this profession as to an Aristotle in philosophy".<sup>17</sup> But Bonini was not a mere *laudator temporis acti*. He was also a musician of his own day, as is unequivocally attested by both his own compositions (in particular the *Affetti Spirituali* written, as the work's title reads, "in stile di Firenze") and his own strenuous and particularised defence of Marco da Gagliano (whose "elegant manner of composing" he admired) from the criticisms of the ran-

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<sup>16</sup> See SEVERO BONINI, *Discorsi e Regole sopra la Musica et il Contrappunto*, Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana e Moreniana, ms. 2218, modern edition by Leila Galleni Luisi, Cremona, Fondazione Claudio Monteverdi, 1975, p. 83. This work can be dated to the mid 17th century.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

corous Muzio Effrem, who belonged to the race of “ignoramuses merely tainted in the flour of counterpoint”.<sup>18</sup>

But to return to our mass, which (we can be sure) met with Bonini’s approval, for he admired the “leggiadrissimo style” Gagliano used in his “madrigals [...] motets for five and six voices, with a few masses”.<sup>19</sup> Here we shall point to the very few passages that diverge from Zarlino’s rules and Palestrina’s *exempla*. On the choice of melodic intervals, we may mention an ascending diminished fourth by which a leading note reaches the third degree (avoiding its natural resolution on a secondary tonic), whereas Zarlino had censured the use of the tritone, the diminished fifth and similar intervals, given that they “greatly offend feelings” (Ex. 7).<sup>20</sup> Above all, however, we note a passage that is clearly reminiscent of the zigzagging movement typical of the instrumental *basso seguente* (Ex. 8).

As for the vertical dimension, the examples that deviate from strict counterpoint are again rare. In the voice leading, as well as a few cases of hidden fifths and octaves (stigmatised by the theorists but in actual practice widely used, above all in compositions destined to remain in manuscript), there are a couple of cases of parallel movement between perfect consonances, very similar to examples formerly criticised by Zarlino and in every respect similar to passages that the above-mentioned Muzio Effrem picked out for censure in Gagliano’s madrigals. In the first example we have two octaves saved only by an intervening crotchet (Ex. 9); in the second, three fifths saved by a crotchet (Ex. 10).

These can be compared with a couple of examples published by Zarlino together with other “passages not to be used at great length” (Ex. 11) and with a passage criticised by Muzio Effrem, which belongs to a madrigal “*a note nere*” and hence has its stresses on the crotchet instead of the minim (as in the above examples). Effrem was in turn criticised by Bonini, who came to Marco da Gagliano’s defence by pointing out certain more serious infringements committed by Effrem in his own very few madrigals (Ex. 12).

On the matter of dissonant clashes, again we find only sporadic ‘slips’. For example, the entry of one voice that dissonantly clashes with an accented passing note in the bass (Ex. 13), but above all the six-four chords that are sometimes created against the bass at the entries of the subject of the second *Kyrie* (a procedure not used by Palestrina but admitted by Zarlino himself, who approved of fourths against the bass if they themselves are below a major

<sup>18</sup> For the two quotations, *ibid.*, p. 110 and p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> See GIOSEFFO ZARLINO, *Istitutioni harmoniche [...] di nuovo in molti luoghi migliorate, & di molti belli secreti nelle cose della Pratica ampliate*, Venezia, Francesco de’ Franceschi, 1573<sup>3</sup>, p. 239.

third – “since they cannot but make good effects” – as in fact happens in the Ex. 14).<sup>21</sup>

Also worthy of note in the above example is the clash of a major seventh produced between the crotchet passing note of the tenor and that of the soprano. Now, if we consider all these cases, we in fact find that at the practical level of composition they were all fully accepted in the early 17th century, above all in the madrigal literature. So the above observations merely confirm the insubstantiality of the possible theoretical criticisms and show how little bearing they have on how the mass should be viewed within the specific cultural and stylistic context of the Medicean grand-ducal chapel of the time. Besides, Marco da Gagliano himself wrote a long and fully argued reply to Effrem’s censure (introducing themes somehow reminiscent of those brought up in the much better-known polemic between Artusi and Monteverdi, though lacking all reference to the word-music relationship that central to Monteverdi’s poetics), which he published as an appendix to the edition of *Sacrae Cantiones* of 1622 as a letter to his “benevolent readers”.<sup>22</sup> The telling words chosen by Gagliano (or whoever might have written the text in his stead) stand as an excellent indicator of the profound breach between the attitude of the music theorist and that of the composer who essentially submits his work to the judgement of his patrons and of a public interested only in the practical results:

Music is one of those arts that eminent men do not accomplish without practice. Just as a doctor will never be considered great without the experience and practice of having treated and cured numerous sick, in the same way we must not consider as great a musician who has not given sample of his work in many excellent compositions for the schools of the knowledgeable. In practice one encounters difficulties that were never imagined, and sometimes one considers as perfect a thing that later turns out to be of no value in practice; exactly as the opposite also often happens. And it also happens that the breaking of rules sometimes increases the work’s beauty not a little, as I’ve been told there are many examples in the finest architecture, and as is also frequent in the music of the great men we most esteem; though their disordered beauties, to those without much experience, can be held to be very serious failures and the mistakes of beginners.

The “disordered beauties” that we identified with pedantic zeal in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 289 ff.

<sup>22</sup> See RISM G 106. The complete text of this “afterword” is published in VOGEL, *Marco da Gagliano*, pp. 565-567. The passage published here is taken from the original.



Gagliano's mass are of such minimal importance that we are fully justified in considering the composition in the light of its substantial respect for the authoritative late 16th-century models. It fully belongs therefore to the very particular cultural context in which the musical chapel of Santa Maria del Fiore operated: a context distinguished by the rigid control exercised by an ecclesiastical and political power that did not admit deviations from the closest respect of the most classic Roman Counter-reformation tradition. The events involving Filippo Vitali – who, as *maestro di cappella* from 1651 to 1654, was criticised because he intended to renew a repertory by then obsolete – is symptomatic of that climate. What for Vitali were “very old works”, for the authorities were instead “works customarily sung and performed in the Chapel to universal approval”, and as such could not be put on one side.<sup>23</sup> And so a crystallisation of the repertory was imposed from above: a repertory still substantially made up of the compositions of Palestrina (above all) and Victoria (along with the ‘local’ *maestri di cappella*), all equally considered as enduring models of reference for compositional work, as explicitly acknowledged (in a specifically Florentine context) by Severo Bonini.

It was to this cultural environment that Marco da Gagliano belonged. When composing the six-voice mass, he therefore had to find fertile inspiration in that “solid style of Palestrina” that was still to be admired in late 17th-century Florence by a sovereign as enlightened and expert on contemporary musical styles as the grand-prince Ferdinando de’ Medici.<sup>24</sup>

(Engl. trans. Hugh Ward-Perkins)

<sup>23</sup> See GIACOMELLI, “Palestrina nel repertorio”, pp. 122 ff. and ID., “Due granduchi in cent’anni”, pp. 196-197.

<sup>24</sup> See the letter of the grand-prince of 26 December 1690 to Giuseppe Corso Celani (Firenze, Archivio di Stato, *Mediceo del Principato*, 5877, no. 311, quoted in MARIO FABBRI, *Alessandro Scarlatti e il principe Ferdinando de’ Medici*, Firenze, Olschki, 1961, p. 106).