

The motets of Orazio Vecchi: an anthology

When one comes across the name Orazio Vecchi, one's thoughts inevitably run to his secular music: the *Selva di varia ricreazione* (1590), *Il convito musicale* (1597), *Le veglie di Siena* (1604) and above all *L'Amfiparnaso* (1597). And for a good reason too, given their influence and the role they played in defining the *madrigale rappresentativo* (madrigal comedy) of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The large modern bibliography is further evidence of their importance, even though new editions are perhaps needed. Also fairly familiar is the 'light' repertoire of the *canzonette*, thanks to the research and to the editions of Ruth DeFord, Rossana Dalmonte and Massimo Privitera.¹ And yet, by his own training and for a large part of his professional career, Vecchi was essentially a church musician. He was responsible for the musical chapels of Salò and above all Modena and, though certainly not prolific, he was a composer involved in various genres of sacred music. Furthermore, as is well known, in 1590 he was called upon to help revise the Roman Gradual, a task already begun by Andrea Gabrieli (who died in 1585) and Lodovico Balbi. This volume was published in Venice by Gardano the next year. In spite of this, still today Vecchi's sacred output tends to be put in the background or even neglected; and this particularly applies to the collections of polyphonic music. While specific research on the 1591 Gradual has recently been published,² the bibliography on his sacred music is still substantially restricted to

¹ See ORAZIO VECCHI, *The Four-Voice Canzonettas with Original Texts and Contrafacta by Valentin Haussmann and Others*, ed. by Ruth I. DeFord, Madison, A-R Editions, 1993 (Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance, 92-93); ROSSANA DALMONTE - MASSIMO PRIVITERA, *Gite, canzonette. Studio e trascrizione delle Canzonette a sei voci d'Horatio Vecchi (1587)*, Florence, Olschki, 1996.

² See MARCO GOZZI, "Il Graduale di Angelo Gardano (1591)", in *Un museo nel Castello del Buonconsiglio. Acquisizioni, contributi, restauri*, ed. by Laura Dal Prà, Trento, Provincia Autonoma di Trento - Castello del Buonconsiglio, 1995, pp. 399-414; THEODORE KARP, *On the transmission of some mass chants, c. 1575-1775*, in *Il canto piano nell'era della stampa*, atti del Convegno internazionale di studi sul canto liturgico nei secoli XV-XVIII (Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio - Venezia, Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 9-11 ottobre 1998), ed. by Giulio Cattin, Danilo Curti e Marco Gozzi, Trento, Provincia Autonoma di Trento. Servizio Beni Librari e Archivistici, 1999, pp. 81-97; ANNARITA INDINO, "Il Graduale stampato da Angelo Gardano (1591)", in *Ibidem*, pp. 207-221.

Raimond Rüegge's contribution, which dates back to 1967.³ No matter how absurd this situation might seem (given the composer's importance), it unfortunately fits in with a wider historiographical approach, which tends to relegate the late-16th-century sacred music to the background, as I have pointed out on various occasions (and about which I will say no more here).

Taking into account the weight and overall significance of Vecchi's production, it was obvious and natural that the celebrations organized for the fourth centenary of his death should concentrate on the secular music. This, for example, was also the orientation of the international conference held in Arezzo from 23 to 26 August 2005, organized by the Fondazione "Guido d'Arezzo" as part of its annual polyphonic competition, though in this case there were apertures on various other aspects. Indeed the conference was significantly entitled "Orazio Vecchi: tradition and innovation. The *madrigale rappresentativo* and the reform of the Gradual". Although the opening session was entirely devoted to the reform of plainchant in the late 16th and early 17th centuries and to the Gradual of 1591, some space was also devoted to his sacred polyphony. And on that occasion I presented a paper centred on the motet production, the style and compositional forms used and the stylistic interactions with the secular music. In it I tried to show that the motet genre also showed significant signs that the late-16th-century tradition increasingly coexisted with the more innovative influences (though obviously in different degrees) in the more responsive and sensitive composers working at the end of the century (and both Palestrina and Lassus fall into this category). I thought it appropriate to focus on the motets because this was a compositional genre that, like the Mass, required a complex and contrapuntally elaborate style, yet also allowed for more experimentation and openness than the Mass, also in view of its close rapport with the verbal text. Moreover, the origins of those texts were various: liturgical, Biblical, devotional and so on (instead the sacred nature of the *Ordinarium Missae* is a case apart and there, if anything, the perfection of the "harmony" could only hope to be deemed worthy of accompanying it). Less significant (not in absolute terms, but in relation to the task I set myself) would have been the other liturgical collections: i.e. the Lamentations and Hymns, which have a different destination, belong to a different compositional genre and employ compositional techniques that aim more at stylistic simplicity and ease of listening and performance (see for example the radical use of *falsobordone* in much of the Lamentations).

³ RAIMOND RÜEGGE, *Orazio Vecchi's geistliche Werke*, Bern - Stuttgart, Paul Haupt, 1967 (Publicationen der Schweizerischen Musikforschenden Gesellschaft - Publications de la Société Suisse de Musicologie, serie II, 15).

The paper prepared for the conference will be published in the next issue of the journal. But as I already did in connection with my work on the motets of Cima, I here offer an anticipation of Vecchi's motet work with a short anthology of works taken from the two complete surviving collections:⁴

- *Motecta Horatii Vecchii mutinensis canonicus corigiensis quaternis, quinis, senis, & octonis vocibus. Nunc primum in lucem edita. Serenissimo principi Guglielmo, palatino, Rheni comiti, & utriusque Bavariae duci &c. dicata. Cum privilegio, Venice, Angelo Gardano, 1590;*
- *Sacrarum cantionum Horatii Vecchii in cathedrali ecclesia Mutinae musicae magistri. Liber secundus. Nunc primum in lucem aeditus. Cum privilegio, Venice, Angelo Gardano, 1597.*

This collection, offering a sampling of the different compositional techniques and the various solutions prompted by the vocal forces, is naturally justified by the quality of the music itself alone. However, there is another reason that prompted me to anticipate the article itself with an anthology of music, and that is the completely inadequate state of the modern editions of his sacred works, and of his motets in particular. The list given by Rügge⁵ exclusively includes the classic anthologies of Franz Commer, Carl Proske, Stephan Lück and Luigi Torchi, since nothing else was available at the time he wrote his book. It is indeed very short:

Mottetti, 1590

Erat Jesus eiciens demonium, 4 v.	C. Proske, <i>Musica Divina, Tomus II, annus I, Liber Motetorum</i> (1855)
Cantabo Domino in vita mea, 4 v.	C. Proske, <i>Musica Divina, Tomus II, annus I, Liber Motetorum</i> (1855)
Velociter exaudi me, Domine, 4 v.	C. Proske, <i>Musica Divina, Tomus II, annus I, Liber Motetorum</i> (1855)
Euge serve bone, 4 v.	C. Proske, <i>Musica Divina, Tomus II, annus I, Liber Motetorum</i> (1855)
Alleluia. Laudem dicite Deo, 5 v.	S. Lück, <i>Sammlung ausgezeichneter Kompositionen für die Kirche</i> , vol. III (1884-1885)
Quem vidistis, pastores?, 5 v.	F. Commer, <i>Musica Sacra</i> , vol. XXVII (1886)

⁴ There are complete copies of the two editions in Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, U.284 and U.290. I wish to thank the library in Bologna for kindly and swiftly making the material available.

⁵ RÜEGGE, *Orazio Vecchis geistliche Werke*, pp. 92-93.

Beati omnes qui timent Dominum, 10 v. L. Torchi, *L'arte musicale in Italia*,
vol. II (1897)

Sacrae cantiones, 1597

O Iesu Christe miserere mei, 5 v. F. Commer, *Musica Sacra*, vol. XXVII
(1886)

Since 1967, however, very little can be added. Rüegge himself transcribes in an appendix to his book the motets *Speciosa facta es* (1597, 5 v.) and *Osculetur me* (1590, 6 v.), while *O sacrum convivium* (1590, 5 v.), along with a new transcription of *Quem vidistis, pastores?*, can be found in a doctoral dissertation by Michèle Fromson together with other polyphonic settings of the same texts.⁶ It seemed useful, therefore, to offer modern editions of certain other works using different forces, including double choir, so as to give a more instructive preliminary picture of Vecchi's motet output.

To conclude, a brief note on the edition of his music. Both the wide range of note values used by Vecchi for the notes of syllabic value (running from the breve down to the semiminim) and the actual tactus (waverling between the semibreve and the minim) have made the maintenance of the original values practically inevitable. Also maintained, for similar reasons, are the mensuration signs, which are c and ç in the motets of the first collection, and exclusively ç in those of the second. Their preservation also has a documentary value, testifying to a compositional practice at times influenced by rhythmic structures specific to secular music, and at times seeming to differentiate the two mensurations semantically (and semiologically) depending on the liturgical occasion (even though the process is not always linear and consistent, above all as far as the notation is concerned). Finally, above all in the *sacrae cantiones* of 1597, it seems to imply a theory of genres and related compositional techniques, regardless of the actual tactus required and/or the notation, and to move decidedly in the direction of offering a purely external and graphic display of the concept of gravity, which begins to assert itself, at various levels and with various meanings, in the very concept of sacred music in the *stile osservato*.⁷ So much for the sections in duple metre. As for the triple-time sections, which are invariably measured in breves and semibreves, the traditional tactus theory would appear to be more applicable. In fact, however, this is also another instance of the crisis of a notational system that still lacked sufficient means of writing in a manner different from, and more consistent with,

⁶ MICHÈLE YVONNE FROMSON, *Imitation and Innovation in the North-Italian Motet, 1560-1605*, 2 voll., PhD. diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1988, vol. II, pp. 127-131 (*Quem vidistis, pastores?*) and 192-206 (*O sacrum convivium*).

⁷ I shall expand on these points in greater detail in my forthcoming article.

the duple sections, and that instead had to resort to long note-values to obtain a somewhat swift, *vivace* movement. Obviously this does not imply any proportional relationship (even though a consolidated notation calculated on the old *alla breve* tactus is used), but instead its significance must be seen in relation to the different oscillations of the real tactus, which is indicated by the notation rather than by the signs *c* and ϕ .

⁸ A fairly similar point of view is expressed in DANIELE SABAINO, “Ancora sul dilemma ‘tripla’ o ‘sesquialtera’ nel repertorio tardo-rinascimentale. Nuove osservazioni tra ecdotica, semiografia e prassi esecutiva”, in *Problemi e metodi della filologia musicale. Tre tavole rotonde*, ed. by Stefano Campagnolo, Lucca, LIM-Una cosa rara, 2000 (Didattica della filologia musicale, 2), pp. 69-83.