

SEVERIN CORNET

Severin Cornet was born ca. 1520-30 in Valenciennes, North of France, and died in Antwerp (current Belgium) in 1582. In his youth (like many of his Franco-Flemish colleagues), he worked in Italy: in the 1550s he was a member of the choir at *Santa Maria Maggiore*, one of the four basilicas in Rome. He returned to Flanders where he was *Kapellmeister* in Malines (Mechelen in Dutch) starting in 1564, later holding a similar post at Antwerp Cathedral from 1572 to 1581. He lost his job when Calvinism effectively limited Catholic musical activities, and he died shortly after.

Cornet's first published works include his *Canzone napolitane*, printed in 1563 by G. Latio in Antwerp and likely financed by Giuseppe D'Oria, who is believed to be a Neapolitan great music lover and patron. This edition has luckily survived in its entirety, and the transcription of several of his works, presented here, is based on facsimile of that material.

Three other collections by Cornet, including sacred and secular works, were published in 1581, in this case financed by merchants and other prominent people in Antwerp. *Villanesche napolitane* and re-writings of some of his earlier *canzone* can be found in these collections.

Cornet was a master of the paraphrase technique (re-writing of existing works, own or by other composers, be that a phrase, a melody, a section or an entire piece, and providing new musical ideas based on the existing model), granting him qualities of a great master of polyphony and displaying solid imitative techniques.

I earned my Doctorate in Letters and Human Sciences with a specialty in Musicology in 1979 at the CESR (*Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de la Renaissance*) of the *Université F.*

Rabelais de Tours, France. My main doctoral project was a transcription of the complete *Mellange d'Orlande de Lassus*, a retrospective collection of his works published in Paris in 1570. A copy of my doctoral dissertation can be found at the CESR library and can be freely and easily accessed. In the critical study section, I was able to demonstrate that several of Lassus's contemporary composers, and also of the next generation, did indeed paraphrase many of his French *Chansons* (Didier Le Blanc, Gerard Turnhout, Noel Faignient, Jean de Castro, Sebastian Verdonck), a true testimony of the admiration that the great Flemish master's work generated. The list of those composers also includes Severin Cornet, who reworked five *Chansons de la Mellange*. My transcriptions of three of those five are presented here. Two things are evident in these works: Cornet's mastery of the paraphrase technique and his profound respect and admiration for the great master born in Mons.

I would like to pose a question (or perhaps a hypothesis): could it be that Orlande de Lassus and Severin Cornet had the chance to meet personally in Naples during the 1550s? Lassus's stay in Naples during that time is well documented, however there are no concrete indications about the possibility of Cornet residing there, albeit temporarily. What we do know is that it was indeed in Naples where they both got acquainted with the *canzon villanesca alla napolitana*, an extremely popular poetry and music genre among musicians of that period.

Likewise, Cornet's *canzone* show certain similarities to Lassus's *villanelle*, which were published starting in 1555. Homophonic and imitative passages alternate, following the AABCC scheme, a common thread in the genre.

Cornet's *canzone* comprise an ideal repertoire to be sung by chamber choirs and small vocal ensembles, and its relative complexity is due to the varying phrasing between different voices.