**The different styles in Josquin Desprez *chansons***

Josquin Desprez has left us a very varied legacy of compositions in diverse styles, both sacred and profane. As to his French *chansons*, nearly 70 have arrived to our days. Some of them just have their title in French, because their poems were not written in manuscripts and editions of the period (as in Petrucci *Canti A-B-C*). In addition, some of his instrumental works have a French *incipit*.

In the excellent book writen by my friend and colleague Dr. Jacques Barbier (*Josquin Desprez, bleu nui editeur, 2010,* [*www.bne.fr*](http://www.bne.fr))),you can find a detailed list of the works from 3 to 6 voices with text (or just title) in French, in the same way as for his Latin and Italian profane pieces.

In the field of sacred works and before the problematic of having to compose new masses on its text (“thousands” times sung and heard previously) composers of the 14th and 15th centuries faced the challenge cleverly appealing to preexisting melodies, mainly from GregorianChant. This new musical material, which was used either as a *cantus firmus* or as a source for canonic treatment, gave rise to new musical ideas which emerged in order to compose a new work.

So, they used a variety of techniques at their disposal, such as transposition, augmentation, (diminution), inversion, retrograde, etc., but canon was, without any doubt, perhaps the most valuable resource.

Those musicians reworked techniques of a given material such as *transposition, augmentation, inversion* and *retrograde*. And the canon was, without any doubt, a very valuable resource. This widespread practice was also used in profane works.

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Specifically, in his french *chansons* the poems were generally written by XV french *rétoriquers*, mostly *truncate rondeau*.

Their general climate is that of courtly love, and frequently unrequited love. The “Rondeau” was a poetic-musical form which consisted in a vocal work based on a very long strophic poem which included the repetition of its whole first stanza. Mid to end 15th century composers (Josquin, Brumel, Perre de la Rue, Compère) abandoned that archaic form and just kept the first lines of the whole poem, what is known as the *truncate rondeau.*

Josquin´s chansons may be grouped in 4 different styles :

. *Rustic chanson* : frequently based on a popular tune of the period with texts of scarce literary value (either extracted from a polyphonic work of other musician). Mostly written for 3-4 voices, Josquin used canonical techniques in them, which is clearly identifiable either in the upper or in the lower voices (e.g. *Baises moy*, *Dictez moy bergere,* and *En l’ombre d’ung buissonet*, all of them with double canon S-A and T-B, *Adieu mes amours*, with a T-B canon, *Belle pour l’amour,* with a T-B canon in the beginning, *Comment peult avoir* *joye* with a S-T canon, and *Une musque de Biscaye,* with a S-A canon)

**.** Chanson based on *cantus firmus*: a chanson using a *cantus firmus* as main source, a technique which was quite spread out in composition of masses of the time. They were:

1. Based on Gregorian *cantus firmi* or on other Latin para-liturgical texts, or
2. Extracted from a polyphonic French work by other composer.

Josquin granted to the Tenor line this preexistent tune in long rhythmic values while the other voices dialogue in systematic imitation, alternating with homophonic passages. This obviously generates poly-textuality (e.g. *A la mort* and *Ce povre mendiant* in 3 voices, *Cueurs desolez, L´ami a tous, Ma bouche rit* and *Nymphes des bois,* all in 5 voices, and finally *Nymphes, nappés,* and *Fors seulement* in 6 voices).

. Melancholic chanson: using lamentation-style poems (which were very appreciated by Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V) for 5 or 6 voices, where it is very common to find canonical texture (e.g. canon between S-A *Ie me complains* and *Plaine de dueil*).

. melancholic *chanson* : *lamentation* style poems, very appreciated by Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V, for 5 or 6 voices, where is very commun the use of *canonical* texture (for 5 voices *canon* S-A in *Ie me complains* and *Plaine de dueil*).

But, in most of them I hold that Josquin looked deliberately to “hide” the canonical voices locating them in internal parts (for example, in works for 5 voices: T1-T3 in *Du mien amant* and *Douleur me bat*, T2-B in *Parfons regretz*, A-T2 in *Plusieurs regretz*, T1-B1 in *Incessament*, T1-T2 in *N’est pas un grand desplaisir*, S-T1 in *Cueur langoreux*; in works for 6 voices : A-T2 in *Regretz sans fin,* A-T2 in *Nymphes Nappés* a 6, T1-T3 in *Vous ne l’aurez pas*, T1-T2 in *Petite camusette,* T1-B1 in *Pour souhaitter*, T1-T3 in *Si congie prens*).

. *Chanson in extenso*: in these works Josquin abandoned the canonical technique, aiming to unify the polyphonic content of the work in all voices, alternating imitative and homophonic texture. In these cases it is not a question of canonical vs. *cantus firmus* textures, but rather the achievement of a new style, one that avoids the hierarchy or distinction between voices. Examples in this category include one of Josquin´s signature pieces, *Mille regrets* (poem by Jean Lemaire) and *Plus nulz regretz* (also poem by Jean Lemaire*)*, a *chanson* written mostly in full systematic imitation –yet begininng with a double canon- in 1507 to celebrate the peace between England and the Austro-Hungarian Empire signed in Calais, France, both written in 4 voices. Other good examples include the well known *Je ne me puis tenir d´aimer* and *En non saichant* (5 voices) and *Tenez moy en vos bras* (6 voices).

Arriving at this interesting juncture, some important questions arise:

* Did the composer write the *canoncial texture* at the beginning?
* And then he later completed the polyphony?
* Was it the essential element of the work?
* Or was it its starting point?

**The most important point, in my opinion, is that the great Josquin Desprez, the true *Maestro* of canonical writing (a resource that he permanently used in his sacred pieces) decided to start hiding the canon in his profane works at a specific moment in his compositional life, developing a true imitative style in all voices. In this way, Josquin icites in the listener the perception of full imitation among all voices.**

It is at this point of my analysis that I ask :

Wasn’t it indeed the **beginning** of the complete abandonment of the extraordinary resource of the canon in the subsequent evolution of the French *chanson*? **This move lead to a change in compositional style that can be easily seen in the works of Franco-Flemish composers of the next generation, where all voices are matched without any distinction, alternating polyphonic imitation with homophonic passages.**