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**THE STYLE AND FUNCTION
OF CIVIC MUSIC IN
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Abstract

IN THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, WHILE MOST ITALIAN COURT CHAPELS -- INCLUDING THE NEWLY-REFORMED PAPAL CHAPELS OF ROME -- STRONGLY FAVORED A RICH POLYPHONIC STYLE OF MUSICAL COMPOSITION DERIVED FROM THE FRANCO-FLEMISH STYLES, THE VENETIAN SCHOOL OF COMPOSITION WENT AGAINST THIS TREND, MAKING EXTENSIVE USE OF A UNIQUE AND VERY NOVEL TEXTURE OF ANTIPHONAL AND HOMOPHONIC DEVICES. WHAT RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS CONTRIBUTED TO THE UNIQUE MUSICAL STYLE OF VENICE, PARTICULARLY TO THE MUSIC USED FOR CIVIC RITUAL, AND HOW DID THIS STYLE HELP TO PERPETUATE THE “MYTH OF VENICE”?

This paper is based on a New Cultural History study concerning the role of civic music in Venice at the end of the 16th century, specifically how the music functioned as a component of the “Myth of Venice”. This Myth, according to Edward Muir was “a Venetian reading of the Venetian experience, a story they told themselves about themselves”. More specifically the Myth established and supported the images of the power, wealth, stability, independence, serenity and piousness of the Republic. The study was primarily built on the scholarship of Edward Muir, Patricia Fortini-Brown, Ian Fenlon, Dennis Arnold, Jonathon Glixon, Elenor Selfridge-Field, and Ellen Rosand as well as number of primary sources including the motets of Giovanni Gabrieli, the art of number of

Venetian painters, particularly Matteo Pagan, and the writings of Nicola Vicentino, Gioseffo Zarlino, Giovanni Stringa, Francesco Sansovino, Thomas Croyat, Jean Bodin, and Sir Henry Wotton.

In the late sixteenth century, while most Italian court chapels -- including the newly-reformed Papal chapels of Rome -- strongly favoured a rich polyphonic style of musical composition derived from the Franco-Flemish styles, the Venetian school of composition went against this trend, making extensive use of a unique and very novel texture of antiphonal and homophonic devices. What religious and political considerations contributed to the unique musical style of Venice, particularly to the music used for civic ritual, and how did this style help to perpetuate the “Myth of Venice”?

Motets with sacred texts played a significant role in the civic ceremonies of Venice. These motets reached their height of grandeur with Giovanni Gabrieli. Gabrieli's works were collected in two volumes; the first published in 1597 and the second 1615. From the second volume I have chosen two motets for in-depth analysis; the first is an early work by Giovanni *Beata es Virgo Maria*; the second is a later work on a grander scale, *Deus qui Beatum Marcum*. I have focused on *Beata es Virgo Maria* and *Deus qui Beatum Marcum* because of the particular references made within the texts to key components of the Myth, namely Saint Mark and the Blessed Virgin. Thus the analysis of these motets served two purposes; first they exemplify the dual nature of the civic ritual; and second, they offer explicit references to the Myth in civic ritual, through their texts and musical treatment of these texts. As the style becomes a cultural concept, a structural analysis is not sufficient, rather the approach requires a “cultural iconology” of the music.

In order to examine the musical treatment of the motet texts it was necessary to

analyse both the text underlay and the use of homophonic, antiphonal, and chordal devices used to emphasize parts of the text. To be sure that my understanding of “style” in music fits the sixteenth century Venetian *mentalité*, in particular the attitude towards music and text, I have referred my modern critical values to those in Nicola Vicentino’s *L’antica musica ridotta alla moderna practica* of 1555, and Gioseffe Zarlino’s *Le Institutioni Harmoniche* of 1558, both of which are codifications of the sixteenth century Venetian compositional style since both Vicentino and Zarlino studied under Adrian Willaert. These sources were particularly valuable as they both address the issue of text underlay, as well as the importance of unity between music and text.

In order to understand the function of the music within Venetian civic ritual it is important first to outline not only the ways in which the civic ritual perpetuated the Myth of Venice but the components of the Myth itself and its place in Venetian identity.

The Myth served as a powerful tool of propaganda by first creating an image of the Republic and then continually reinforcing it. Moreover, with the appearance of self-perpetuation the Myth was more readily accepted. By “reading” the Myth in this way it is possible to use the components of the Myth as fundamental parts of the culture that expressed all forms of civic-minded activity. The Myth could be reinforced and augmented only through the concrete expression of the Myth. In this way, civic ritual and its components served, consciously and unconsciously, as purveyors of the Myth. Thus Venetian civic ritual appealed though the physical to the hearts and minds of the spectators, both native and foreign. The music of civic ritual, appealing to both the aural and visual, functioned in the same way.

The political implications of the civic ritual, therefore, did not have to be stressed

explicitly and indeed became all the more potent as the Myth was ingrained and embodied in ceremonial activities. The ritual calendar of the Republic consisted of a number of secular feast days throughout the year. These feasts served as overt and continual reminders of Venetian power. They also augmented the myth in more subtle ways. By annually observing historical events the longevity of the Republic was continually reinforced. The ability of the Republic to withstand numerous threats attested to its stability.

The religious implications of the myth provided a counterbalance for overtly patriotic aspects. In addition, this direct connection forged between the secular and sacred allowed religious concepts to have political implications. The visible practice of religion was seen as being purely pious in nature and as many festivals of state were related to religious feasts patriotism was thus linked to piety. The legends surrounding St. Mark and the Blessed Virgin collectively provided the religious foundations of the Myth.

Venetian civic ritual was, therefore, a ceremonial realization of the close ties between church and state, indeed the dual nature of the Republic, through the combined use of secular and religious imagery. The participation of the Doge in these ceremonies reinforced this duality as his office was both secular and sacred. Likewise San Marco and the palace of the Doge were, collectively, a physical embodiment of the dual nature of the Republic. The palace was the Doge's residence while San Marco was his private chapel. More significantly, San Marco housed the relics of St. Mark and was the centre of sacred ceremonial life in Venice. These two buildings surrounded the Piazza di San Marco, which was the central area of civic procession.

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries San Marco was the centre of music in Venice. The musical organization at San Marco became an issue of pride for the

Republic in the sixteenth century. This attitude towards its importance, in particular the position of the *maestro di capella* continued through to the seventeenth century with the appointment of Claudio Monteverdi.

Along with the new sixteenth century pride, the musical establishment at San Marco developed a unique school of Venetian composition. This Venetian school broke with the tradition of florid counterpoint of the Franco-Flemish school. Adrian Willaert was the catalyst in the development of San Marco's unique musical style. *The most apparent characteristic of this school was the development of a homophonic chordal setting of text and antiphonal echo devices.* The Venetian school was innovative in this approach to setting of text -- in both text underlay and the use of compositional devices which formed a closer relationship between music and text.

It is particularly revealing of the uniqueness of the Venetian thrust that the first person to employ this technique was one of the last of the great Flemish school of composers and the first to teach extensively in Italy. Appointed *maestro di capella* in 1527 Willaert held the position until his death in 1562.

Willaert was prolific in both sacred and secular works. He made significant contributions to both vocal and instrumental forms. In particular his *Musica Nova* of 1540 has been credited with creating a new school of harmonic instrumental music. In sacred music Willaert developed a chordal homophonic approach to religious music which was characterized by the depth of its texture. This chordal approach was significantly different from the florid counterpoint of the Franco-Flemish tradition -- which continued to be developed in northern Italy by composers such as Palestrina -- and was the style which became the cornerstone of the Venetian school. In addition to strictly musical concerns

Willaert showed a great deal of interest in the treatment of text. This interest manifested itself in his interest in text underlay

What prompted a Flemish composer - trained in a tradition in which placement of text syllables under the staff is totally random -- to develop a concern for text setting? Is this connected to the ritual and symbolic values of the imagery used in the texts?

Willaert fostered the continuation of his innovative style of composition through extensive teaching activities. A number of his students later acquired posts in Venice. Those of who attained posts at San Marco included Capriano de Rore, Gioseffe Zarlino, Andrea Gabrieli, and Costanzo Porta. These composers dominated the musical establishment to the end of the sixteenth century and their musical output clearly demonstrated the influence of Willaert.

The close and critical tie in between the “Venetian Style” and the city itself is recognized in the career of Nicola Vicentino -- an exception among Willaert’s noteworthy pupils as he did not secure a job within Venice even though he expanded Willaert’s teachings. Vicentino did not hold a position at San Marco during his lifetime, nor did he hold any positions of similar stature elsewhere. Vicentino’s *L’antica musica ridotta alla moderna practica* of 1555 codified the teachings of Willaert, in particular the issues surrounding Greek music theory and the unity of music and text.

Another of Willaert’s pupils, Gioseffe Zarlino, succeeded Rore as *maestro di capella* at San Marco. Zarlino’s treatise *Le Institutioni Harmoniche* served like Vicentino’s, to make available a clear codification of Willaert’s teachings. Zarlino’s work was, perhaps, even more important as it was more widely read in his own day; Zarlino was, perhaps, the most pre-eminent musical theorist of his time.

Due to his interest in theory Zarlino was far less prolific a composer than his predecessors. The role of composition fell to the organists who were in the employ of San Marco, in particular Claudio Merlo and Andrea Gabrieli. This division of labour between theorist and practising composer systematized and fostered the techniques of the Venetian style just at the moment when ceremonial requirements intensified.

Of these two organists it is Andrea Gabrieli who made the most substantial contributions to the Venetian school of composition. The compositional style of Andrea Gabrieli, rather than merely implementing, expanded Willaert techniques. Though not widely recognized as innovative, Andrea Gabrieli significantly contributed to the development of Venetian homophony. He made extensive use of homophonic texture and his numerous innovations included the repetition of phrases, and use of voices and pitches thus achieving a level of grandeur that surpassed his contemporaries. Andrea also developed antiphonal devices which he used to achieve a rich sonority.

Through his use of simple textures and syllabic melody Andrea's work achieved greater clarity of text. Thus the text-focuses, notably sonorous medium of the Venetian style was perfected just at the moment when civic ritual was entering into its era of greater grandeur.

Andrea's nephew Giovanni Gabrieli followed him as an organist at San Marco in 1585. His early works for Venetian festivals were similar in nature to those of his uncle's. But his later works began to subtly expand the older tradition.

In addition to developments in the area of rhythm, harmony, and modulation Giovanni experimented with textures; for example he would use homophony for sections of the performance done by a single choir and for antiphonal exchanges between choirs, and

polyphony for *tutti* sections. The homophony allowed for a clear initial statement of the text while the antiphony and polyphony allowed for musical expression in the repetition of the text.

The importance of the music in civic ritual can be assessed from a variety of sources, in particular from the visual depictions of musicians in civic ritual, written descriptions of the ceremonies, accounts of rituals of the Venetian confraternities on feast days, and expense reports from San Marco

The function of music as an aural glorification of the Republic is its most explicit contribution to civic ritual. It was therefore in the best interests of the Republic that San Marco had musicians of the highest calibre. The musical establishment of San Marco was funded by civic patronage. The appointment of a *maestro di capella* was a matter of pride to the Republic. Likewise the virtuosity and compositional abilities of the organists applying for a post at San Marco were key considerations.

The physical function of music in civic ritual is reflected in the description of the festival celebrating the discovery of a relic of the True Cross in 1617. The immediate proximity of the musicians and, in particular, the *maestro di cappella* to the Doge, who symbolizes the entire Myth of Venice in his own office, regalia, and place in the civic ritual, indicates that music was a key part of ducal processions.

Final proof of my argument that Venetian Style developed self-consciously as a part of making music function to enhance symbol values in Venetian civic ritual depends on analysing in detail how some key pieces written for civic ceremonies work. I have chose two by Giovanni Gabrieli since his is the most advanced exemplar of the style, and show maximal sophistication about the use of devices. Both are motets, one from early in his

career and one from later. *Beata es Virgo Maria* for six voices, *Deus qui Beatum Marcum* is for ten. Given the limitations of this oral medium I shall only discuss the generalizations I was able to draw from my analysis.

Once textual clarity was achieved through the use of homophonic compositional techniques the use of polyphonic devices in certain sections subtly served to create a counterbalance of slight textual obscuring in order to emphasize the homophonically treated text. When homophony hits the ear it is for highly significant text, text which emphasizes the themes of the Myth. Within the homophonic sections numerous emphatic devices were employed. Giovanni's motets, even from the early period, had definite chordal, almost harmonic, structures. The primary chords were the foundation of the motets, while secondary and borrowed chords were used, in varying degrees, for colour -- primarily in sections with a polyphonic character. Borrowed chords were used in a similar manner,. Moreover, the character of the chords, major or minor, added additional elements of emphasis.

So the music written for civic ritual conveyed the desired qualities of the Republic, namely it's power, wealth, stability, independence, serenity and piousness -- the "Myth of Venice", through a number of devices. Most obviously the number and quality of the musicians within the civic processions conveyed important messages concerning Venice's power and wealth. More subtly the use of liturgical motets supplied a religious impression which reinforced Venice's serenity and piety. However it is the text of these motets and the treatment of text within the compositional style which provides the most powerful means of propaganda. The use of religious imagery pertinent to the Myth of Venice, primarily Saint Mark and the Blessed Virgin, allowed the music to appear pious while it also praised and

glorified the republic. The homophonic nature of the music allowed not only for greater clarity of text but also provided a more substantial sound than florid counterpoint as well allowing greater numbers of musicians/singers to perform with greater ease. And the contrast of homophonic and polyphonic sections in the pieces served to emphasize or obscure specific lines of the text. The style of the music, therefore, perpetuated the Myth in number of ways.

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