Richard Sherr

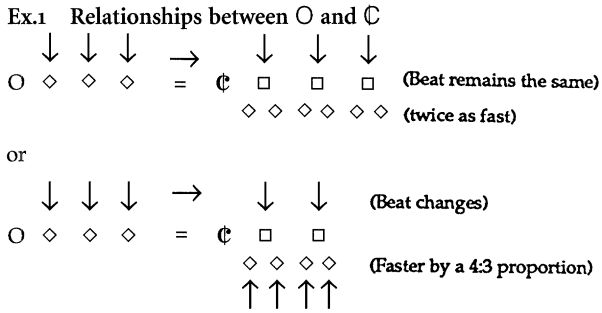
The performance of Josquin's *L'homme armé* Masses

In a recent article in this journal, Willem Elders has discussed certain aspects of the performance practice of Josquin's Masses with special regard to the original notation.[1] A recent recording of the two *L'homme armé* Masses by the Tallis Scholars directed by Peter Phillips (Gimell CDGIM 019 (1989)), prompts me to further reflections on the relationship of the original notation to practical performance and other matters.[2]

The main topic I would like to discuss concerns the choice of relative tempo in the various sections of the Masses. In both these works, the internal sections of the movements are generally written in 𝔠, while the first sections are in O (an exception being Agnus III of the *Sexti toni* Mass). Now there is general scholarly agreement that for Josquin and his generation, 𝔠 when following O designated a faster tempo (that is, the semibreve beat of 𝔠 went faster than that of O). There is however no such agreement about the exact rate of this speeding up. Technically, 𝔠 was an *alla breve* mensuration sign: the semibreve beat of O was to be transferred to the breve of 𝔠, making the semibreves and minims of 𝔠 move twice as fast as those of O. But recently Anna Maria Busse Berger has convincingly demonstrated the existence of another solution: that the semibreves of 𝔠 to O are in a 4:3 proportion, making 𝔠 go somewhat faster while not twice as fast (see ex.1).[3]

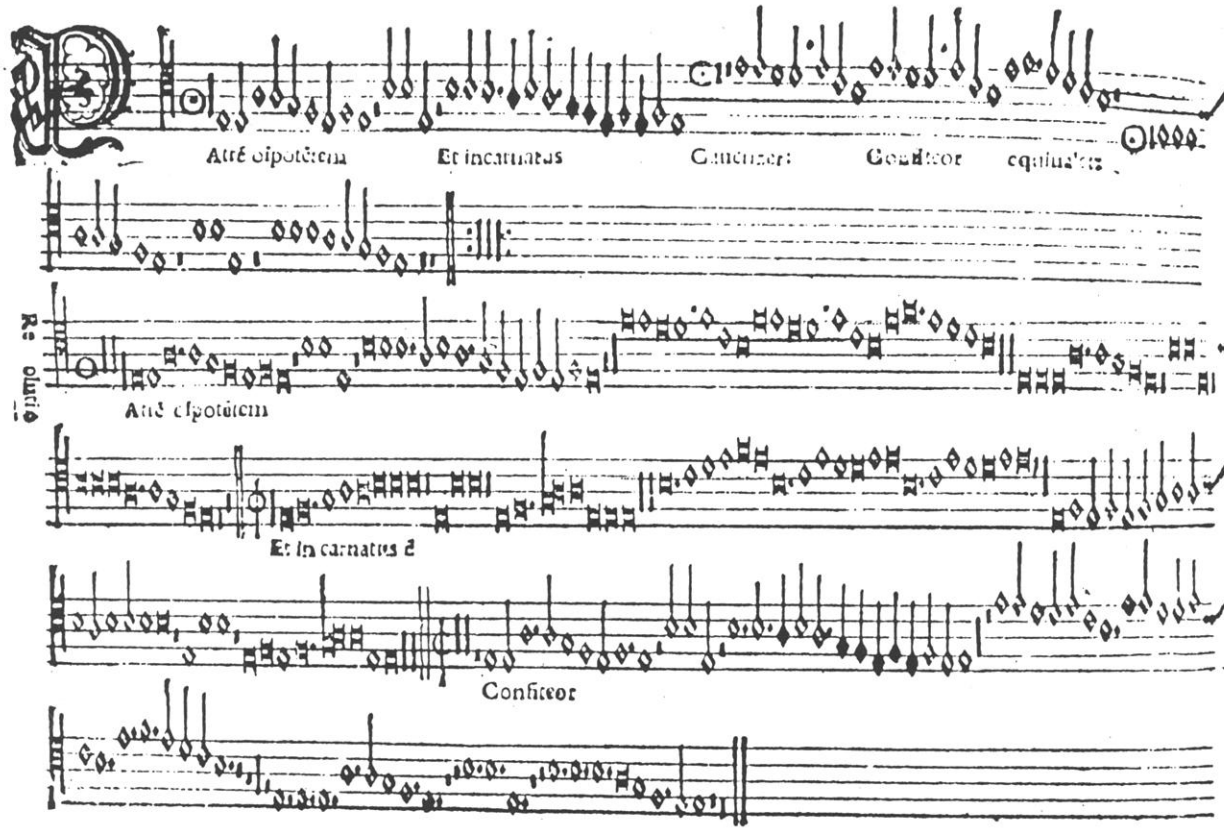
Whichever one chooses, there would seem to be no real reason to reject the essential cue given by the 𝔠 signature when placed after O in a multi-sectioned work. It is thus strange that Phillips has chosen generally to treat as identical the semibreve beat of 𝔠 and O. This is like deciding that a movement marked Vivace in a work by Mozart or Beethoven was not intended to be faster than one marked Allegro in the same work; you might want to perform it that way, but there would have to be some real justification for a choice that everybody would agree seems contrary to the composer's intention. Can any such justification be found?

Ex.1 Relationships between O and 𝔠



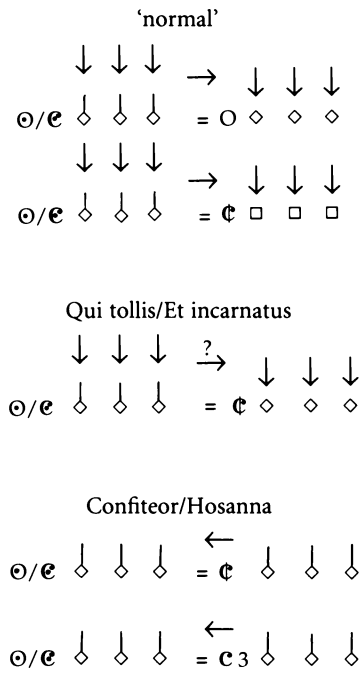
In the case of the *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales* it would at first seem that the tempo relationships would be easy to determine. This is because the tenor remains in the signature ⊙ or ⊂ throughout, while against it the other voices shift from O to 𝔠 to ⌀ to C3. Such notation would seem to imply that the beat of the tenor should remain constant, since that voice would not know that the others were changing time signature (see illus.1).

According to theorists, the signatures ⊙ and ⊂ were signs of augmentation. This meant that the minim of ⊙ or ⊂ would be equal to the semibreve of O or C, and equal to the breve of 𝔠. Thus if the beat of the tenor were unchanging, the other voices would place it first on the semibreve of O and then on the breve of 𝔠, making the semibreves of those sections twice as fast as the semibreves in O. But in fact, things are not that simple. As Arthur Mendel pointed out in 1971, the relationship between the tenor of *Super voces musicales* and the other voices is not 'normal'.[4] The expected relationships certainly obtain in the Kyrie I, Et in terra, Patrem, Sanctus, and Agnus I (minim of ⊙ or ⊂ = semibreve of O), and in the Christe and Agnus III (minim of ⊙ or ⊂ = breve of 𝔠).[5] But in the Qui tollis of the Gloria, and the Et incarnatus est of the Credo—both sections in 𝔠—the relationship of the tenor to the other voices is minim = semibreve, while in the Confiteor in 𝔠 and Osanna in C3 it is minim = minim. The last two cases are explained by verbal canons stating specifically that the tenor here is to move at the speed of the other voices. If we assume however that the tenor beat still remains constant in the other instances, then those 𝔠 sections must move at exactly the same speed as the O sections (ex.2).



1 Josquin, *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales,* tenor as printed by Petrucci

Ex.2 Relationships between tenor and other voices in *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales*



Such a state of affairs was so contrary to what was expected that Mendel could only remark:

> This would seem to mean that the stroke in these movements is meaningless—that, for example, the signature of the Qui tollis and Et incarnatus might just as well be C. This latter signature is very infrequent in Josquin; most pieces in imperfect tempus have a signature of ₵. It may well be that the original meaning of ₵ had been nearly forgotten by this time, and that for all intents and purposes it had simply replaced C without any difference in meaning in most cases.[6]

In other words, this apparently justifies Phillips's interpretation of ₵, and might support his decision to keep the tempo the same in the Christe and Agnus III (where the relationship is the normal minim of ⊙ or C = breve of ₵).

But the changing relationship of tenor and other voices is explicable in a different way. Mendel based his remarks on the version of the Mass published by Petrucci, yet other sources contain verbal canons in the Gloria and Credo that are not in Petrucci. For instance, one of the oldest sources of the Mass—MS Cappella Sistina 197 (*I-Rvat*), copied in Rome in the late 1490s and

thus contemporary or nearly so with Josquin's time there—contains the following notations by the tenor in the Gloria and Credo (the cantus firmus is notated in ⊙ or ¢ in semibreves and minims in all cases: see the top of illus.1).

Et in terra	*supra dicta notes*
Qui tollis	*Tenor verte cito*[7]
Patrem	[nothing]
Et incarnatus	*Tenor Et incarnatus: verte cito*
Confiteor	*Tenor Confiteor: Reverte citius*

Now, 'verte cito' normally meant 'turn [the page] quickly', but here it is clearly a canonic instruction meaning 'turn around quickly'. Since we know the solution of the canon, we can see that 'verte' instructs the tenor in the Qui tollis and Et incarnatus to 'turn around'—i.e., to read the cantus firmus backwards. But 'cito' in this context can only mean 'sing at a quicker tempo'. This is confirmed by the canon of the Confiteor—'reverte citius' (turn around again most quickly)—which instructs the tenor to read the cantus firmus forwards (backwards turned around) at an even quicker tempo.[8] Thus the cantus firmus in these movements (as in the Gloria and Credo of Dufay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*) was to get gradually faster, even though its notation remained the same until (at the end of the Credo) it was literally the same speed as the accompanying voices.

When this is added to the minim = semibreve relationship of ⊙ or ¢ to *both* O and ₵ in the Gloria and Credo, the only way to reconcile the accellerando required by the canon with the notation is for the semibreve of ₵ to move faster than the semibreve of O, and for the tenor in those instances to take its beat from the accompanying voices. Without this, the tenor could not 'move quickly' as instructed by the canon; that is in fact what is implied in Petrucci's resolution of the tenor in O, ⌀, and ₵ (see illus.1). Thus the anomaly noticed by Mendel can be explained, and we can ask if Phillips's choice of tempo does not in fact really violate the intended structure of a Mass he himself admits is highly structured. Whether that faster tempo of the ₵ sections should be at the strict 2:1 ratio or at the recently suggested 4:3 is open to question, although it should be mentioned that the 4:3 ratio will not only produce a more gradual accellerando, but also approximates the 3:2:1 ratio in the three statements of the tenor used in Dufay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*.[9]

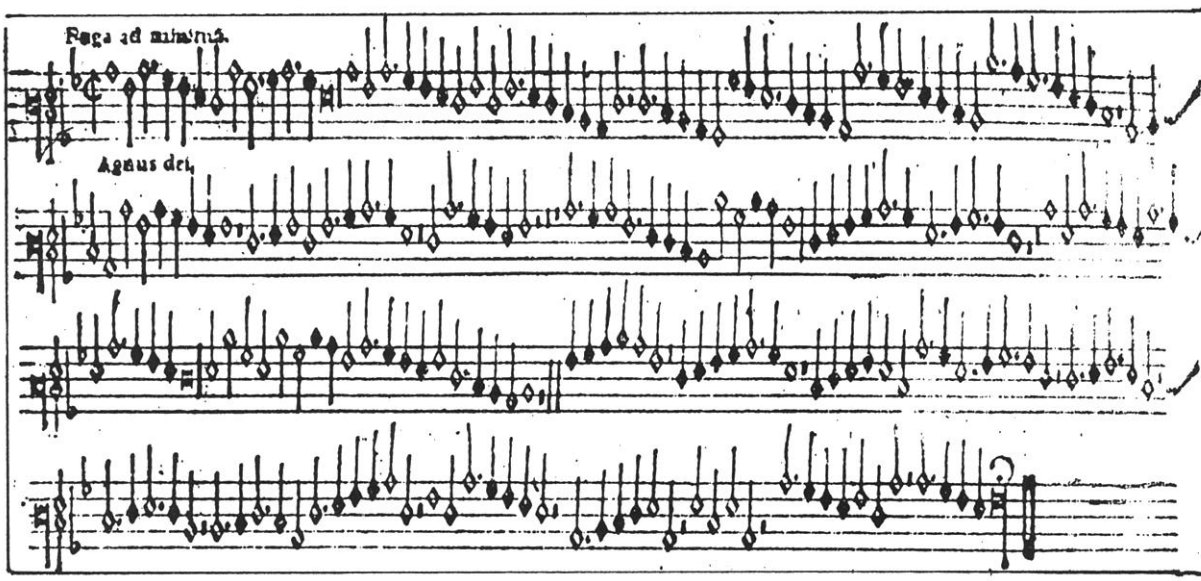
The problem of Agnus III of the *Missa L'homme armé sexti toni* is a bit more complicated. In this section, Smijers's edition (based on Petrucci) gives the signature ₵ in all parts. Given Phillips's interpretation of ₵, this remarkable piece—three canons, two at the space of a minim, one involving retrograde, creating an expansion to six voices—is made to take a very long time indeed. But the time signatures used in the sources imply a different situation. In the manuscript sources, the upper voices are noted in the signature O2 (minor perfect mode) while the cantus firmus voices are noted in O, and the semibreve of O equals the breve of O2.[10]

This is the classic situation of the signature O2—simultaneously an indication of mode (we might say 'three-bar phrases') and diminution (the beat goes on the breve). That would imply that the semibreves in O2 should move twice as fast as the semibreves in Agnus I (in O), which should supply the tempo for the cantus firmus voices in O. The 'fuga ad minimam' would thus go even faster than on Jeremy Noble's recording of this Mass, where (correctly interpreting Petrucci's notation) the tempo established for the ₵ of Agnus II becomes the tempo of Agnus III. (Noble seems to be using the 4:3 solution rather than 2:1.)

Alas, there was confusion about this even in the 16th century. In discussing the signature O2, Ludovico Zacconi refers explicitly to the problem caused when one part is in O and the others in O2. Referring to a section of the *Missa Bon temps* by Brumel where the tenor is in O,[11] Zacconi says that there are some who claim that the beat should be on the semibreve of O2, meaning that the voice in O should double all the note values (as Petrucci does with the cantus firmus voices in the *Sexti toni* Mass). In the end, however, he comes to the conclusion that the proper interpretation is to take the beat from the semibreve of the part in O and that the parts in O2 should be sung 'twice as fast'.[12] Zacconi, then, would prefer Agnus III of the *Sexti toni* Mass to be taken with the *fuga ad minimam* moving very quickly against the canonic lower voices (see ex.3 and illus.2).

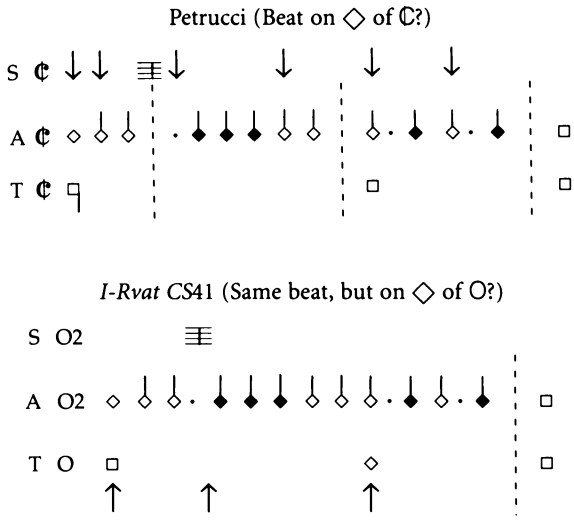
I must say that I agree with him here, and I think Phillips's interpretation of ₵ cannot be sustained. Josquin had a habit of reserving some fireworks for his last Agnus Dei, and here they result not merely from the canonic artifice, but from true vocal virtuosity, virtuosity that was certainly available in all the musical organizations to which Josquin belonged.

Phillips does not discuss the reason for his decisions with regard to tempo (the length of sleeve notes does not allow for extensive discussion), but he seems to have



2 Josquin, *Missa L'homme armé sexti toni,* altus Agnus Dei III as printed by Petrucci

Ex.3 Relationships between cantus firmus and other voices in *Missa L'homme armé sexti toni,* Agnus Dei III, using ℂ and O2



decided that a convincing performance can be obtained by ignoring the tempo implications of the mensuration signatures in favour of text expression. Thus the plea for mercy in the Gloria of the *Sexti toni* Mass, (Qui tollis), is performed with a semibreve beat even slower than the one in the preceding section in O, while the positive Et resurrexit (a section selected for special comment in the notes to the recording) is actually sung at the faster 4:3 ratio Berger has recommended. The Et incarnatus of the *Super voces musicales* Mass also makes its point through a slow tempo (although, as might be expected, the tempo picks up at the Et resurrexit section).[13] I don't quite know how to respond to this. I really do not think that the slow tempi represent Josquin's intentions in these works, and I don't believe that they were sung that way in his day; on the other hand, there is a certain legitimacy to Phillips's interpretation (at least from a modern point of view of the expression of words in music), and the performance of the Tallis Scholars has so much to recommend it (the intonation is perfect, the vocal quality is crystal clear, it is sung with only one or two people on a part) that I hope they go on to record all the Masses of Josquin in whatever tempo they like.[14] Since Phillips complains that one of the reasons the *Super voces musicales* Mass cannot be performed in concert is its length, he might find that adopting the faster tempos indicated by the sources would give him (and us) the opportunity to hear this Mass live, even if to do so means abandoning the reverential quality that a slow tempo gives to texts like Et incarnatus est.[15]

In comparing the two Masses, Phillips states that the range of the *Super voces musicales* Mass is unusual in that the superius is low and the bass high; he contrasts this with the 'wide overall range' of the voices of the *Sexti toni* Mass. This implies that the latter Mass is somehow more 'normal' in range than the former. There is certainly some truth to this, and indeed, the performance does sound more 'normal' (i.e., not as low as its companion work). But this is because Phillips has, without acknowledging it, chosen to transpose the *Sexti toni* Mass up a 4th, undoubtedly to accommodate the range of his female singers.[16] For in written pitch the Mass lies

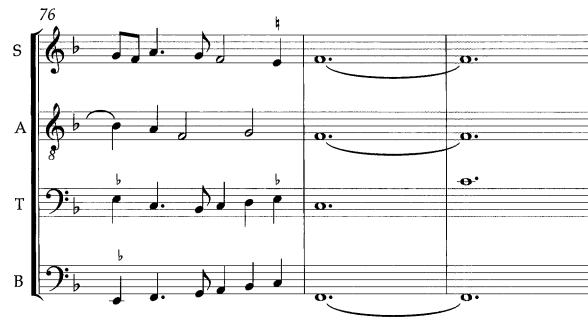
extremely low, particularly in the superius, which descends to *f*, while the altus can conveniently be transcribed in the bass clef. This is caused by Josquin's decision to write a Mass that was truly in the sixth mode as defined by the range of the voices (that is, the octave *c*-*c'*, or *c'*-*c''*). Thus the superius cannot move much above *c''*. Josquin also abandoned the more normal pairing of authentic and plagal groupings in four-voice works, where superius and tenor would be authentic or plagal and the altus and bass would be in the paired mode.[17] In this Mass, superius, tenor and altus are all in the range of the sixth mode. Only the bass cannot use the sixth mode range, for to do so and have it produce the *F*s needed in cadences would bring it down to *C*, much too low for a normal bass part.

It should perhaps be mentioned in this context that Josquin's decision to write a *L'homme armé* Mass so clearly in the sixth mode was in its way just as audacious as the decision to use the solmization syllables in *Super voces musicales;* indeed, it may even have been more audacious. For if there was ever an authentic mode melody it is the *L'homme armé* tune. To use it as the cantus firmus of a work in a plagal mode forces the composer to violate the tune's integrity in a basic way. Simply, it means that none of the voices written in the plagal mode can ever present the tune entirely in any one section or movement, for if they did, they would clearly not be in a plagal mode. And in the three of the four voices of Josquin's Mass that are plagal, this is exactly what happens. The tenor (still the main bearer of the cantus firmus) never presents the entire melody by including its upper tetrachord ('on a fait partout crier') section in the right register. By restricting itself in this way, it can interpret the opening *f*-*c'* range of the tune not as the lower pentachord of the fifth mode, but as the upper pentachord of the sixth. And when the second section of the tune does appear in the tenor (in the Christe and Agnus III), it is first transposed to *c'* (keeping it in the sixth mode), then kept by the canon in the range *c*-*f*, which could be interpreted as the lower tetrachord of the sixth mode, and also deprived of the rest of the defining octave; a similar result obtains when the superius presents that part of the tune at Et resurrexit. The range of the superius technically combines the fifth and sixth mode, but does so by *downward* extension, so that the top notes are still at the limits of the sixth mode. In fact, the only voice to sing the melody all the way through is the one not in the sixth mode, the bass (in the Gloria).

Although the practical reason for Phillips's transposition is understandable, and the very fact that he can do it reinforces his statements about the overall range of the work, I have the feeling that an audible 'lowness' of tessitura was intended to be part of the 'sixth-mode feel' of the piece (which, in the papal chapel at least, would have been sung only by men). In this regard, Noble's decision to transpose only up a step, perhaps gives a more 'authentic' sound.

I cannot end without mentioning the remarkable simultaneous cross relation that is heard in the final bars of the Patrem of the *Sexti toni* Mass, a cross relation made especially audible in Phillips's recording (see ex.4).[18]

Ex.4 *Missa L'homme armé sexti toni,* conclusion of Patrem



The simultaneous *e* flat and *e'* natural here turn out to be the result of *musica ficta*.[19] Both *e*s in the altus have been flattened in order to avoid melodic tritones and also, in the case of the first *e*, because of a *b* flat in the tenor. I am less compelled by this solution than Phillips is. Simultaneous *mi* contra *fa*s were considered worse than melodic ones, and several theorists counsel singing melodic tritones if necessary to avoid the vertical difficulty. And while the altus would probably have sung the first crotchet with a flat, he must have known that the cadence was coming, would indeed have heard the beginning of the expected suspension in the superius. At that point, he may have decided that the *e*-natural was the lesser of the two evils. Or if he did sing the *e* flat, he might have found himself in one hell of an argument, possibly involving the beard pulling to which these singers were occasionally prone. What *musica ficta* giveth, *musica ficta* can take away. On the other hand, I loved it—what can I say?[20]

Richard Sherr is Professor of Music at Smith College. He is presently writing a history of the papal choir in the 16th century.

[1]W. Elders, 'The performance of cantus firmi in Josquin's masses based on secular monophonic song', *EM,* xvii (1989), pp.330–43

[2]The Phillips recording is reviewed in *EM,* xviii (1989), pp.315–6. The *Super voces musicales* Mass has also previously been recorded by Bruno Turner (Archiv stereo 415 293-2 AH) and the *Sexti toni* Mass by Jeremy Noble (Vanguard, The Bach Guild HM 3 SD).

[3]A.M. Busse Berger, 'The Relationship of Perfect and Imperfect Time in Italian Theory of the Renaissance', *Early Music History,* v (1985), pp.1–28. See also A. Planchart, 'The Relative Speed of *Tempora* in the Period of Dufay', *RMA Research Chronicle,* xvii (1981), pp.33–51.

[4]See the 'Workshop on Josquin's Masses', in *Josquin des Prez: Proceedings of the International Josquin Festival-Conference,* edited by E.E. Lowinsky (London, 1976), pp.706–9.

[5]I am leaving out of this discussion the question of 𝅝 in Kyrie II.

[6]'Workshop', *op cit,* p.708

[7]Other sources containing 'verte cito' are: Basel, Universitäts-Bibliothek, MS F.IX.25 and Jena, Universitäts-Bibliothek, Codex Mus. 32, according to Smijers. See the facsimile of Jena 32 in Elders, *op cit,* p.335, and R. Taruskin, *Antoine Busnoys Collected Works,* Masters and Monuments of the Renaissance, v, pt.iii (New York, 1990), pp.28–9, n.61.

[8]Petrucci has the canon 'aequivalet' here.

[9]This is not difficult to do, as some experimentation will prove.

[10]Petrucci had a habit of translating O2 to 𝅗𝅥 with triple-spaced rests (no doubt he was influenced by Tinctoris, who recommended exactly this notation for the minor perfect mode). The sources employing O2/O are: *I-Rvat* MS 41; Casale Monferrato, Archivio e Biblioteca Capitolare Duomo, MS M(D); *A-Wn,* Handschriften- und Inkunabelsammlung, MS 11778.

[11]L. Zacconi, *Prattica di Musica* (Venice, 1596), Libro Secondo, Cap. XXV (pp.104–6)

[12]'Segnando tutte l'altre parte con la zifra binaria appresso il circolo perfetto & si comprende che questa parte o che bisogna cantarla secondo l'ordine del Tempo perfetto, & quell'altre parte che hanno la sudetta zifra cantarle la mettà più presto; overo quelle cantarle come vanno, & questa raddoppiar li il valore; facendo che la Breve bianche in cambio di valer tre Semibreve habbiano da valere sei, & le negre in cambio di dua quattro, servando l'istesso ordine nelle pause come ogno uno lo può videre et giudicare.

Se io fossi forzato a dirne il parer mio, io non direi altro solo che questa parte si cantasse con il suo naturale valore, & l'altre che hanno la zifra binaria dovessero mancar per la mettà havendo quel segno che in gran parte ne fa sicuri & certi.'

[13]Turner does the same in his reading, although his initial tempi are somewhat faster than Phillips's.

[14]I am, however, also happy to have Noble's recording, where the tempo relationships are respected.

[15]'There is an extra merit in having a performance of *Super voces musicales* on disc, since I believe that, on account of its length and the tessitura of its voice parts, a concert performance of it complete would be virtually impossible.' (Sleeve notes.)

[16]The *Super voces musicales* Mass seems to be transposed up a step.

[17]This is what makes determining the authentic/plagal mode of a polyphonic composition so difficult.

[18]It seems to be there in Noble's recording also, although it is somewhat hidden by the choral sound.

[19]None of the sources of the Mass seems to have a written *e* flat.

[20]Tinctoris, in his counterpoint treatise, seems to admit that such cadential simultaneous *mi-fa* relations did actually exist (although naturally he says they should be avoided). But his examples involve augmented octaves caused by the raised leading note, not by a flattened note. See A. Seay, ed., *Johannes Tinctoris (c.1435-1511), The Art of Counterpoint,* Musicological Studies and Documents, v (American Institute of Musicology, 1961), p.131. See also S. Boorman, 'False relations and the cadence', in *Altro Polo: Essays in Italian Music in the Cinquecento,* ed. R. Chateris (Sydney, 1990), pp.221–64.