Performing Choral Music from the Renaissance

A practical look at ways to make the performance of choral music from the Renaissance both authentic and fulfilling.

The complexity of the music means that I will begin with, and spend the most time on, sacred music.

Let's sing!
• As a deer longs for founts of water, so my soul longs for you, O God.

Sing!

Personal story about Sicut - HS v. College

next – RATIONALE
Rationale for Performing
Renaissance Sacred Music

1. The music is part of our choral heritage as an historical musical experience.
2. A body of literature that is accessible and affordable to many age and ability levels.
3. 5 Vowels for unifying.

Get away from English
Poor, unstandardized habits
Latin is the best for standardizing the language
Diction

• International Phonetic Alphabetic = LOVE

• Vowels: 5 pure vowels - open

\[
\begin{align*}
  a &= [a] \\
  e &= [\varepsilon] \\
  i &= [i] \\
  o &= [\varnothing] \\
  u &= [u]
\end{align*}
\]

International Phonetic Alphabetic = LOVE

Different types of Latin – French, German, Italianate

Differing opinions among people who speak Latin – closed on stressed, open on unstressed, etc.

Apply to Sicut Cervus
Sicut cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum,

ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.
4. Helps to teach and establish musical independence.
5. It is far removed from the oversentimentality of later music, particularly today’s music.
It's the economy, text, stupid.
It's the economy text, stupid.

Perotin

Locus Iste
Immediate communication to the listeners
It's the economy text, stupid.

Linear and storytelling nature of the music
It's the economy text, stupid.

Word Painting
It's the economy text, stupid.

Counterpoint - new materials match the old to reinforce the meaning.
Sicut *cervus desiderat ad fontes aquarum*, (as the deer desires for a fount of water)

*ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.* (so desires soul mine for you, God)

- Phrases are about lines of text (as opposed to Perotin)
- The music takes its form from the divisions of the text
- Start with the stresses - Proper word and syllable stress controls the rhythmic flow
- don’t stop at each word - it is like stopping at the bar line (demonstrate and fix)
- The natural rhythm of the text was respected and descriptive words were made more explicit by their musical treatment.

Sing opening line again, with stresses and descriptive words.
Rinascimento

from rinascere
"to be reborn" - Italian
Philosophy began in Italy with Petrarch in the 1300s.

“True, we love life, not because we are used to living, but because we are used to loving. There is always some madness in love, but there is also some reason in madness.” - Petrarch

Philosophy of different eras almost always begin with literature and work their way to music last.
Sought to create a citizenry (frequently including women) able to speak and write with eloquence and clarity and thus capable of engaging the civic life of their communities and persuading others to virtuous and prudent actions. This was to be accomplished through the study of the *studia humanitatis*, today known as the *humanities*: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy.
**David** is a **masterpiece** of **Renaissance sculpture** created between 1501 and 1504, by the Italian artist **Michelangelo**.

Michelangelo's David possessed the same characteristic as other classic sculptures of the Greek era.

- Shaped in a slight "S" curve that hints at the influence of the contrapposto style previously used in Greek sculptures (John T. Paoletti, 2005). Most of its weight on one foot so that its shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs.

- By having the human sculpture lay one leg forward and tilting the hips in one direction gives the piece an illusion of a freer and more life-like.

- The Greek sculptures showed the human body as the ultimate in God's creation: healthy, strong, muscular and natural.

- Michelangelo adds life to his sculpture by giving intensity to David's face as well as his stance.
Historical Background

Innovation and Discovery

The Printing Press, 1440
The New World, 1492

- 1501: Venetian Petrucci used Gutenberg's printing press technology to publish the chanson collection Harmonice Musices Odhecaton A
Historical Background

Growth of commercial enterprise (Italian City-States)

• This also meant the rise of the bourgeois class (ownership of the means of production)
Historical Background

Protestant Reformation in the 16th century

Next - Ave Maria - Josquin
Josquin Desprez: Ave Maria . . . virgo serena

Let us use Ave Maria to discuss Melody and Texture in the Renaissance
Melody and Texture

Melody

Often based on Gregorian Chant (cantus firmus, commonly found in the tenor)

• Opening melody is from a chant, but the rest is new - parody
Melody and Texture

Melody

Each part is equally important

Except for the first voice to enter in a phrase, there is no discernible prominence of one voice over another.
Melody and Texture

Melody

Stepwise motion abounds

Great for solfege!
This Ave Maria is a little more extended down low than many
Melody and Texture

Melody

Phrasing is irregular

- Cadences - unisons m. 7, 17, 23, 31,
Melody and Texture

Melody

Dramatic words are emphasized

Particularly in secular music, not so much here.
Melody and Texture

Melody

Dissonant and altered tones may be leaned on for their fullest effect

This can often be found at cadences
Melody and Texture

Texture

Independence of voices

Points of imitation

• Single voices or Duets between the high voices are imitated by the two lower voices at m. 32
Melody and Texture

Texture

Homophony had its place

• m. 40 Homophony All four voices participate in singing the phrase “virgo serena,” creating a skillful closing punctuation to this musical section.
Melody and Texture

Texture

Independent parts that result in a beautiful, blended, balanced whole

- Textures, using the contrast between two, three, or four voices to create distinct musical sections. Josquin’s use of contrast signifies a more modern approach to creating musical form.
Melody and Texture

Texture

The vertical is a result of the horizontal.

This is linear music.

Let us listen!

Listen for those things, and listen to how the music drives to the cadences, where it regathers energy to move on.
Ave Maria

- 1611 woodcut of Josquin des Prez
Performing Editions

- How do I select a good performing edition?
Choir Book

Palestrina’s only known autograph manuscript

• next - part book
We find:
• 5 line staves
• Key Signatures
• Time Signatures
• Durations of pitch and silence
• Text Underlay

We do not find:
• Tempo
• Dynamics
• Articulations
• Ties (although there are dots)
• Bar lines
Why I like this –

- It gives the original pitch and what the original note values were.
- It gives the original meter (tempus perfectum)
- It gives all editorial markings in brackets
- Dynamics in dots
- Identifies cadences – not necessary, but nice
- It gives the translation in the score
- It gives the source material – (Marian Antiphon paraphrased in Alto throughout)
- It brackets the 3s while giving modern barlines
Why I don’t like this – from cpdl –

- What are the original values?
- Pitch level?
- Who is this written for?
- Text underlay is weird
- Translation?
Here is a copy of editorialized O magnum, without real bar lines

Notice:
First bar is a 3
2 types of music – fake bar or variable bars
O magnum mysterium

O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger!

Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord.

Alleluia!

Let us look at Rhythm and Tempo in this music
Rhythm and Tempo

Everything is editorial regarding tempo.

No tempos indicated

Tactus was about mm. 50 - 80

Close to the our resting pulse
Dennis Shrock says that they may have existed in the full scores, but not in individual parts.

Look at Palestrina again
Choir Book

Palestrina’s only known autograph manuscript
Rhythm and Tempo

The music is put together in arches, with cadences as points of repose and regathering of energy.

m. 9 – unison D, with tenor line carrying over into next phrase
Rhythm and Tempo

3 Types of stress

1. Syllabic
2. Agogic
3. Tonic

Beginning

1. Word stress
2. Men of sacramentum
3. Highest note – D (highest of piece)
The music naturally wants to group into 2s and 3s
Rhythm and Tempo

Syncopation should be handled on a case by case basis.

The metrical pulse is often clouded, or syncopated.

The inflection of the text is dominant.

Alto m. 25

Tum would be a downbeat in modern notation

repeated fs are separated
Rhythm and Tempo

Tempus Perfectum

• m. 53

The term *tempus perfectum* refers to a specific metrical division prevalent in compositions written during the 15th and 16th centuries, the basic premise of which being that a 'breve' (the base note value) be divided into three 'semibreves'. The 'three in one' principle is easily identifiable with the Holy Trinity, thus the term 'perfect meter'. So composers would use this triple meter extensively in response to the perfection of the Trinity.
Rhythm and Tempo

Finding the tempo

1. What is the pulse note or tactus?

2. What is the smallest division of the beat?

3. Consider the text - Joyous? Sad? Contemplative?

4. What are the acoustics of the performance space?

1. Breve
2. Tempus perfectum section – 1/8 notes are 1/6 of the beat
3. Mysterious
4. This room – a little faster

Let us sing!!!
O magnum mysterium
O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament, that animals should see the new-born Lord, lying in a manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Alleluia!
Cantate Domino

Hans Leo Hassler (1564 - 1612)

Sing unto the Lord a new song:
Sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
Sing unto the Lord, bless His name;
show forth His salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the heathen,
His wonders among all people.

How about applying 2’s and 3’s to the line

Sing Bass Line
1. Read translation
2. Speak the text out of rhythm with word stress
3. Conducting 12 12 123 123 away from the music
4. Speak and conduct without pitch
5. Sing and conduct without words
6. Put them together

Try with Alto Line
Put them together

Let us Listen

Next – Instruments
Sing unto the Lord a new song:
Sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
Sing unto the Lord, bless His name;
show forth His salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the heathen,
His wonders among all people.
Instrumental participation often took the form of a single player within the vocal ensemble in Burgundian and German Choirs between about 1480 and 1520.

Spain: a bajón, used to double bass lines, was to be found in the closet of virtually every church in Spain from the early decades of the century onwards.

The practice flourished on Mexican soil, where polyphony in the 1530s seems to have been accompanied by trumpets, shawms, flutes, drums, and bells, at least on occasions like Corpus Christi processions.

Instruments:
recorders, viols, lutes, cornetti, sackbuts, shawms, flutes, drums, and bells

Possible mix:
S - Recorder or Flute
A - Viola
T - Oboe
B - Cello

In Italy, after 1550, homogenous ensembles were preferred to instruments of a contrasting nature.
“The singers of the King [Ferdinand] sang one part of the Mass, the singers of monseigneur [Philip the Fair] the other part; master Augustin played the cornet with the singers of monseigneur, which was good to hear with the singers.”

-from the chronicle of Antoine de Lalaing at a Mass in Toledo in 1502

Ludovico Grossi da Viadana (Cento Concerti Ecclesiastici (1600)) wrote that singers were to omit the lines that were not vocally represented and recommended that the organist fill the parts, especially the imitative entries.

Bach often performed Renaissance music at Leipzig, and the organ played along.

A collection of Masses by Victoria published in 1600 carried an inscription that all were suitable for organ. For some double choir music there were organ parts written out.

Tunes may be freely embellished if sung by soloists.
Michael Praetorius
1618-1620

Organ, Sackbutts, Shawm
Cornett
Children
Men are mad that the trumpets are playing too loudly
Choir Book
Mangy dog
Size of Choirs

The Bavarian Court Chapel Choir with Lassus

1430 - Sacred Polyphony began to be sung by multiple singers
15th century 3 - 4 men, or as large as a dozen or more

by 1500 four parts were standard
Superious - Boys
Altus - Men and boys, castrati in the later 1500s (despite being opposed by the Church)
Tenor - "to hold" cantus firmus
Bassus

By 1600:
King's College (Cambridge), Magdalen Choir (Oxford), Papal Choir- 32 singers
Bavarian court chapel with Lassus - 60 singers and half that many instrumentalists

Next - Sing Joyfully for Tone, Timbre and Dynamics
Sing joyfully unto God our strength.
Sing loud, sing loud unto the God of Jacob.
Take the song and bring forth the timbrel,
The pleasant harp and the viol.
Blow the trumpet in the new moon!
Even in the time appointed and at our feast day.
For this is a statute for Israel,
and a law of the God of Jacob.
Tone and Timbre

- Men only
- Purity of tone
- Compatibility of tone between voices
- Vibrato-less
- Voice Types were different than today

1. Male voices only
2. Purity of tone was required by the Catholic attitude toward worship (less emotional, more objective)
3. Compatibility of tone between voices is the key - unify tone and blend
4. Vibrato-less - boy choir, outer parts are equal
5. Voice Types
   Physical Size
   Nutrition
   Age of Puberty
   Musical Training
   Linguistic background
   Vocal techniques
   Aesthetics
Dynamics

• No dynamics indicated
• Most performances probably did not use extreme dynamics: pp - f is a good starting point
• Avoid excessive crescendo and diminuendo - long notes either intensify or decay within a dynamic
• Steady sound - more voices equal more sound.
• Used to heighten dramatic contrasts

Apply to Sing Joyfully

Joyful – forte side (mf) with room to grow to m. 10

m. 10 “Sing Loud” – f = everyone is singing!

m. 16 : softer (articulation change based on the consonants)

m. 24 The pleasant harp is softer

m. 30 – Blow the trumpet – F

m. 39 – new section, softer dynamic
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m. 30 – Blow the trumpet – F
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Listen to the first part
Sing joyfully unto God our strength.
Sing loud, sing loud unto the God of Jacob.
Take the song and bring forth the timbrel,
The pleasant harp and the viol.
Blow the trumpet in the new moon!
Even in the time appointed and at our feast day.
For this is a statute for Israel,
and a law of the God of Jacob.
O Nata Lux

O Light born of light
Jesus, redeemer of the world
Mercifully deem us worthy
To offer prayers and praise
You who once deigned to become flesh
For the sake of your lost ones
Grant that we become members
Of your holy Body

Tallis creates a passionate and harmonically vibrant setting.

*O Nata Lux* is mostly homophonic and chordal;

Yet the harmonic language bristles with ‘cross relations’, rapid juxtapositions of chromatically opposite notes such as F and F sharp.

Last cadence of the motet presents the most famous and pungent dissonance in all English music—one voice moves to F sharp right at the same time a second sings F natural; the second then moves to E flat, another shocking dissonance with the bass D. The mystical union with Christ’s body is not painless!”
O Nata Lux

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liturgical</strong></td>
<td><strong>Everyday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger choir</td>
<td>One per part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men and boys</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Non-functional, for wealthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefit of the service</td>
<td>Benefit of the singers (entertainment)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evenness of tone and phrasing</td>
<td>Litting with variety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smooth lines</td>
<td>Dance rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant mood within work, or at least sections</td>
<td>Rapid changes of mood possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitation abounds</td>
<td>Imitation not as common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythm less important</td>
<td>Rhythm more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of text rarely used for internal interpretation</td>
<td>Start with the meaning of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional harmony</td>
<td>Bold harmonic expressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through composed</td>
<td>Repetitious/strophic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word stress and accent</td>
<td>Word meaning important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme legato</td>
<td>Articulation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
He is handsome and fine, my husband is,
There were two gossiping women in the village,
Saying one to the other, do you have a good husband?
He doesn't scold me, or beat me either.
He does the chores,
He feeds the chickens
And I take my pleasure.
Really you have to laugh
to hear the cries of the chicks and hens:
Co, co, co, co, dae, little flirt, what's this?

Passereau
gossip of a pair of French peasant women.
The speaker claims that her husband is fine and gives her no trouble:
he doesn't annoy her or beat her, he does the housework
she is free to pursue and enjoy her own pleasures...
extremely light, and even dancelike, musical style to set this rustic dialogue.
imitative entries of the first melody (faint echoes of the earlier "Netherlandish" chanson style)
the music proceeds in bouncy phrases like the talk and the dances

The first textual mention of the two women is left to the two highest voices (twice)
the text continues to discuss the clucking of barnyard hens (Jannequin)
"coquette" - FLIRT!; clear onomatopoeia for the birdsong
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And I take my pleasure.
Really you have to laugh
to hear the cries of the chicks and hens:
Co, co, co, co, dae, little flirt, what's this?
Hark, all ye lovely saints above,
Diana hath agreed with Love,
His fiery weapon to remove. Fa la.
Do you not see
How they agree?
Then cease, fair ladies; why weep ye? Fa la.

See, see, your mistress bids you cease,
And welcome Love, with love's increase;
Diana hath procured your peace. Fa la.
Cupid hath sworn
His bow forlorn
To break and burn, ere ladies mourn. Fa la.

Ballet style – fa la la
2s and 3s – opening phrase
Listen or sing
Hark, all ye lovely saints above,
Diana hath agreed with Love,
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Do you not see
How they agree?
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Diana hath procured your peace. Fa la.
Cupid hath sworn
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To break and burn, ere ladies mourn. Fa la.
Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone
Feeding her flock near to the mountain side.
The shepherds knew not,
they knew not whither she was gone,
But after her lover Amyntas hied,
Up and down he wandered
whilst she was missing;
When he found her,
O then they fell a-kissing.

note: 'hied' is a form of the archaic verb 'hie' which means 'to hasten or hurry';

• John Farmer 1599.
• occasional imitation.
• word painting. in the opening line: only the soprano sing since she was all alone.
• "Feeding her flock near to the mountain side", all the voices sang since it was her flock.
• Alliteration
• second phrase, which begins with "Up and down he wandered" and ends with "then they fell a-kissing" repeats, causing the elision "kissing up and down."
• Tempus perfectus

• Let us sing
Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone
Feeding her flock near to the mountain side.
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they knew not whither she was gone,
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note: 'hied' is a form of the archaic verb 'hie' which means 'to hasten or hurry';
The white and sweet swan
dies singing, and I,
weeping, approach the end of my life.
Strange and diverse fates,
that he dies inconsolate
and I die happy.
Death, that in dying
fills me wholly with joy and desire.
If in dying I feel no other pain,
I'd be content to die a thousand times a day.

Arcadelt
• Opening note is a pickup, not a downbeat
• I conduct the first measures in 3, with a pick up
The white and sweet swan
dies singing, and I,
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Strange and diverse fates,
that he dies inconsolate
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Rehearsal Techniques

- Start with the text meaning
- Rehearse cadences first
- Learn metrics first without the text
- Short rehearsal segments are preferable to longer segments
- Rehearse in Circles

The intellectuals wanted to recapture the Greek artistic ideals
Greek drama was propelled by conflict - Contrast became an important component
  - voice pairing
  - registers
  - timbre shifts
  - sections derived by changes in textures, etc. . .
Conducting Sacred Music

- Little conducting is necessary.
- Each new line is a continuation, building upon music that came before. The music must change with each new line.
- Discover the linear flow of text in each part.
- Tactus = Touch (Common pulse)
- Meter is what we think, Pulse (tactus) is what we feel. Things want to group.
1. Textual Primacy!
2. Independent Linearity - avoid downbeats - motion is always forward except at the cadence
3. Embrace of contrast
4. Arsis et thesis (anacrusis and crucis) - gathering and releasing energy (dance - raising the foot, lowering the foot)
5. Cadential inevitability - goal oriented
The Beans

- I Fagiolini