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Polychoral performance practice and *maestro di cappella* conducting

Florian Bassani

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Professional performance today of Italian seventeenth-century sacred music, and vocal polyphony in particular, is based on a setting of practical conditions, cultural circumstances, and aesthetic prerequisites that differ radically from those of Roman, Venetian, or Neapolitan *seicento* choristers and instrumentalists. The question of how far such factors may influence generally the results of musical performance would merit a separate study. Therefore, the following discussion focuses on an almost unexplored field of interest, the performance of Roman polychoral sacred music, considering such differences, in order to enable today's performers to find access to some basic principles of this "lost species" among musical practice.¹

An average Roman seventeenth-century church chapel (as those at S. Giovanni in Laterano, S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli, or S. Luigi dei Francesi) comprised between eight and ten permanent singers (2-4 sopranos, 2 altos, 2 tenors, 2 basses).² On special occasions during the year, like the recurrence of the church's dedication or the patron saint's day, the size of the same chapels could be multiplied by extra singers and instrumentalists. Whereas in the context of regular church service, the size of a chapel would limit the performance to a maximum double-choir repertoire, increased performing forces in the festal *musiche straordinarie* allowed the execution of works for four, six, eight, or even more choirs.

Polychorality, not only that of a specifically "Roman" stamp, is a phenomenon in music history that is tied to a specific historical framework of conditions and, consequently, has

¹Some aspects of the topic have been described in a brief report on an eight-choir music performance, prepared and realized under my direction in Berne (Switzerland) in May 2009 (see Florian Bassani, "Erkenntnisse zur mehrchörigen Aufführungspraxis nach römischen Vorbildern" *Concerto - Das Magazin für Alte Musik*, Heft 226-7 [June-August 2009]). For a detailed inquiry on performance practice of Roman seventeenth-century polychoral repertoire, see my current research *Römische Mehrchörigkeit (ca. 1600-1710). Untersuchungen zu Geschichte, Satztechnik und Aufführungspraxis* (forthcoming).

²The Papal Chapel (Cappella Pontificia) with an average of twenty-four active members and the Cappella Giulia at S. Pietro with its eighteen singers must be considered remarkable exceptions, in contrast to the vast majority of permanent chapels in various churches. Even the Cappella of S. Maria Maggiore, which in the course of the century maintained at times up to fifteen singers, must be regarded as clearly above average in terms of number. An interesting "snapshot" of the situation in Rome taken in 1694 by the Bolognese Giovanni Paolo Colonna reveals that thirteen out of twenty-five chapels considered in the document were formed by only four or five singers (SSATB; see Oscar Mischiati, "Una statistica della musica a Roma nel 1694," *Note d'archivio* Nuova serie, I [1983], 209-227). By this time, however, the "golden age" of Roman chapels was about to end. An overview of the musicians and singers present in Rome in 1708, recently discovered by Patrizio Barbieri, informs that in only fourteen years the number of chapels had diminished to sixteen while the personnel "in some of them had been further reduced." This development continued in the following decades, by the mid-18th century, the number of Roman chapels "had decreased to just ten" (see Patrizio Barbieri, "An assessment of musicians and instrument-makers in Rome during Handel's stay: the 1708 Grand Taxation," *Early Music* 37/4 [2009], 599ff.).

disappeared from practice with the extinction of those circumstances. Various kinds of conditions, like the mere presence of a sufficient number of professional singers available in town or the existence of solvent patrons (e.g. cardinals, religious orders, chapters of important churches), together with their particular need of an adequate public representation, are only some of the most important ones. With the disappearance of polychoral sacred music culture, evidently an entire cosmos of knowledge regarding the performance of the respective repertoire has ceased to exist. The following reflections are an attempt to approach this complex array of questions, ranging from the already mentioned performance prerequisites, over particularities of performance practice, towards possible results that may be expected from the application of such fundamentals.

Performance basics in comparison

To illustrate the basic conditions that affect the performance practice of seventeenth-century polychoral Roman music, a brief comparison with general requisites of today's music culture may provide the most descriptive access. Some of the most important and at the same time most obvious elements and devices in the "equipment" of an average performer of polyphony in the modern professional music business are the following:

- Sheet music

Thanks to modern score editions as the common form of written reproduction of a composition (whether or not polychoral), the singer or instrumentalist is accustomed to perceive the work, at least in technical terms of reading, "as a whole." In this disposition, every single element of the composition – in few modern clefs – is reproduced more or less equally, and the complete sound result is "visualized," giving the reader from the very beginning an overall view of the piece in all its components. Current piano reductions of an instrumental accompaniment of the written-out vocal texture (if required) may represent a compromise in editorial terms, but the goal is the same.

During the performance, the reproduction of the score allows the singer or player to track visually the other parts (particularly when theirs is resting) and therefore guarantees an optimal orientation.

- Rehearsals

Another matter of course for modern vocalists is a scheduled rehearsal time of the ensemble – possibly on a regular basis – for the preparation of musical works. The joint approach to the repertoire, overseen by a responsible director, makes it possible for the single participants, though they prepare individually, to acquire familiarity with the work as a whole and provides, if necessary, the possibility to master efficiently difficult passages by well-aimed study. Furthermore, it allows the integration of the director's aesthetic and artistic intentions into the choral performance.

- Direction

The role of the modern choir director as a "conductor" of the vocal ensemble in the moment of performance is not at all limited to the function of communicating to the singers the meter by means of hand movements but also comprises the visual representation of all kinds of modifications

of tempo, dynamics, phrasing, or expression through gestures of both hands, eye contact, facial play, and other physical action. It encloses, furthermore, the option to carry out and communicate spontaneous changes of the prepared performance mode. The choir director usually does not make use of auxiliary means or conducting instruments, as the gestures can be displayed best by bare hands. Beyond that, he represents the central and immediate point of reference in terms of coordination for every single performer involved. Similar to modern orchestral practice, choir directing in this form reflects the utmost degree of immediate influencing control of the director on the performance process.

- Models and stylistic conditioning

A musician gains the possibility to get to know a musical work through listening by attending performances. Often, though, a work is also available as a recording, and more renowned compositions can even be found in a great number of versions realized by several generations of performers. By means of this efficient tool, a singer may study and memorize the composition as a whole, and the individual part respectively (in particular by repeated listening), in terms of a supplementary training, completing this way the active preparation of his part through the score. At the same time, his idea of the actual performance “style” may be put into more concrete terms thanks to the recording. Since it may happen that certain recordings influence one’s own perception and performance of a work in quite a significant way (particularly in aesthetical terms), many performers refrain deliberately from shaping their own idea of a composition by this means.

An important element of a modern performer’s self-image, which not least the interest in “historically-informed performance practice” has called in question, is the fact that a singer or instrumentalist in the course of a “western” music education usually acquires a vast, though often basic, overview of several musical epochs and styles. As a consequence he disposes of a number of different sources (especially in aesthetical terms) from which to draw inspiration, an issue that at times may lead to the difficulty of correctly differentiating certain influences and conditioning in order to avoid stylistic “contaminations” of his performance. The extraordinary richness of a wide panorama can therefore turn out to be an obstacle in terms of an adequate stylistic distinction of the performance itself.

For seventeenth-century Roman singers who obtained their musical training by *maestri di cappella* such as Virgilio Mazzocchi, Orazio Benevoli, or Giacomo Carissimi and served under their direction not only in a regular chapel service but also in the context of polychoral performances, the same aspects listed above reveal a notably different milieu. The relative basics may be characterized as follows:

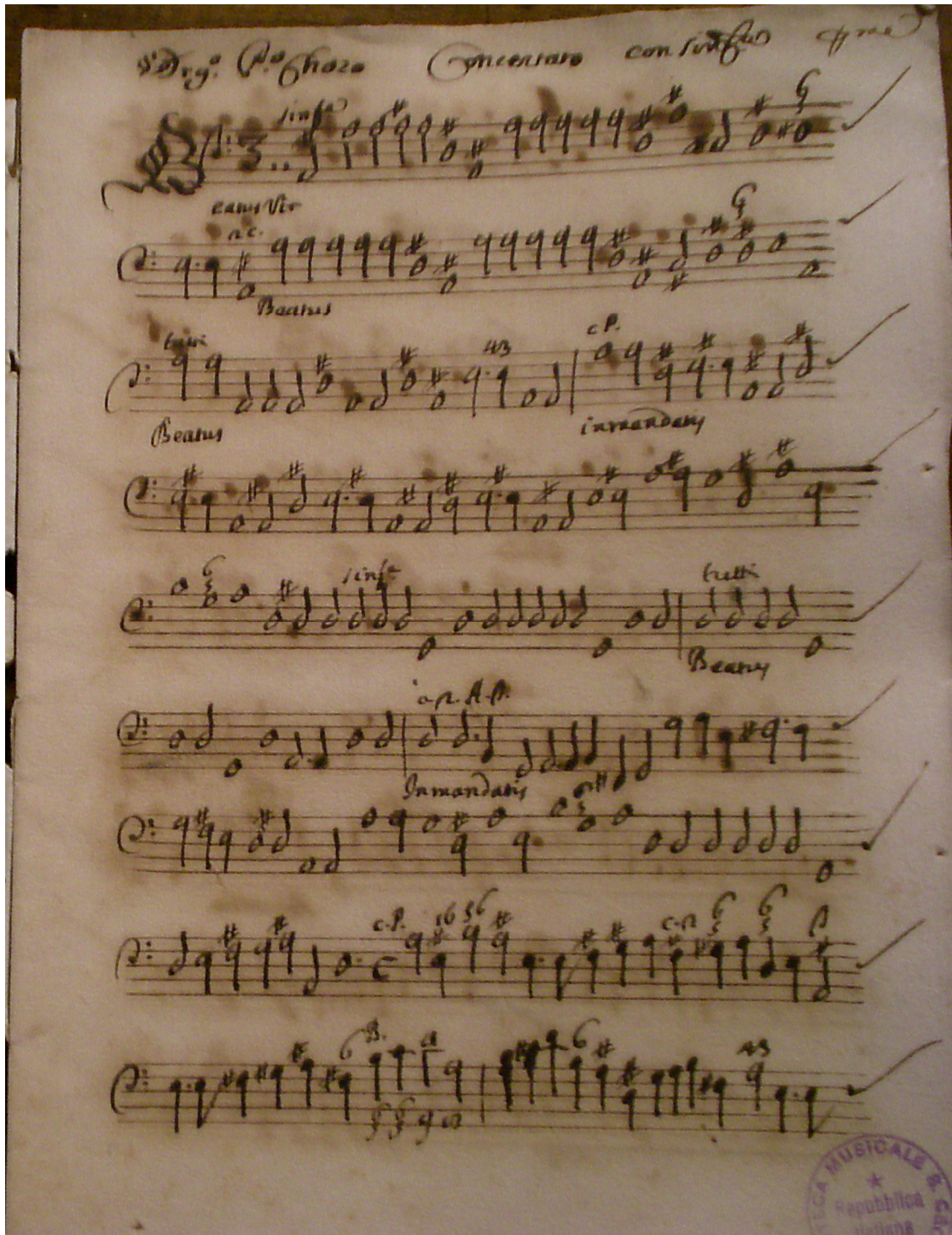
- Sheet music

The great majority of polychoral compositions have not survived in the form of scores, but in part-books, mainly in manuscript. The sheet music of every single choir usually consists of one part for each voice or instrument (soprano, alto, tenor, bass, organ; furthermore violin, cornetto, theorbo, etc.). Only the organ parts, in addition to the continuo line, usually contain references for the player, such as text incipits to facilitate orientation in the course of the work, or short notes regarding the musical texture and disposition (“Sinf[oni]a,” “2 C[anti],” “tutti,” “à 2. A[lto e] T[enor],” “P.o [coro],” “2.o [coro],” “3.o [coro]” etc.), which also help the organist in choosing an adequate combination of registers and adapting his realization of the continuo part (see **Examples A1, B1, C1, D1**).

Example A1/2/3

Orazio Benevoli?, *Beatus Vir* for nine “real” parts in four choirs, with two violins: *Org[an]o P[rim]o Choro*, *Canto [primo] P[rim]o Choro* and *Canto [secondo] P[rim]o Choro*. I-Rsc G. MS. 01 (int. 1, 2, 3)

Courtesy of Biblioteca Musicale Governativa del Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia, Rome

Example A1

Example A2

Canto 2.º Rovo

eatus : vir beatus beatus
 vir qui timet dominum beatus beatus vir qui
 timet dominum in manu
 eius
 do let nimir be-
 atus : vir qui timet dominum Potens in
 terra cui semen e ius semen eius potens in terra
 erit semen eius
 generatio rectorum generati

BIBLIOTECA MUSICALE S. Cecilia
Repubblica Italiana

Example A3

Canto 2.º Novo

e aly... vir...
 qui timeb dominu Beatus bea
 tus vir qui in meo domino in munda -
 - in eius vo - let nimis
 Beatus... vir qui me do - minus
 Potens in terra eius semper eius
 generati
 No vultus vultus generatio vultus
 Benedicatur

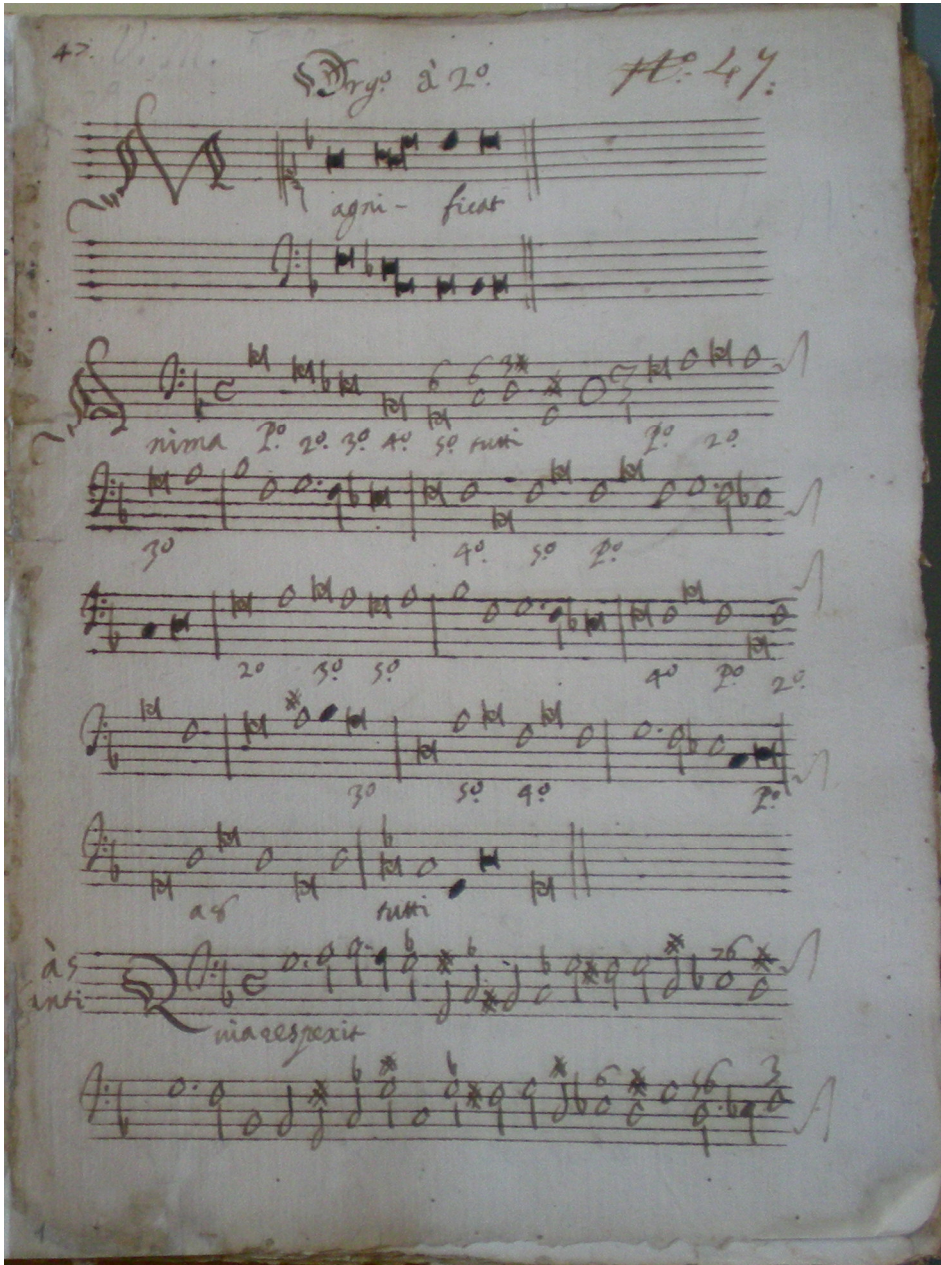
BIBLIOTHECA MUSICALE S. CECILIA
 Republica
 Havana

Example B1/2/3

Virgilio Mazzocchi, *Magnificat* for 20 “real” parts in five choirs: *Org[an]o*, *Cantus [...]* *P[rim]i Cho[ri]* and *Cantus [...]* *4.i Cho[ri]*. I-TRfeining, F P 74/1, F P 74/3 and F P 74/16

Courtesy of Castello del Buonconsiglio. Monumenti e collezioni provinciali, Trento

Example B1



Example B2

Contra 20 P. 1. Ch.

agni - ficot

nima mea Dominū exul-

tauit in Deo saluati meo

in Deo in Deo saluati meo

4. 5. Cant. uia respexit humili- tam an-

cille sue ecce nomen huius be-

ra me, dicent om-

nes gentes o - nes

bea - tam bea - tam me

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on aged, slightly stained paper. The notation is written in dark ink and consists of ten staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written in Latin and are interspersed between the staves. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat informal, typical of historical musical manuscripts. The paper has a yellowish-brown tint and some visible wear and tear, particularly along the right edge.

Example B3

5^o Cantus à 20 4^o Cho.

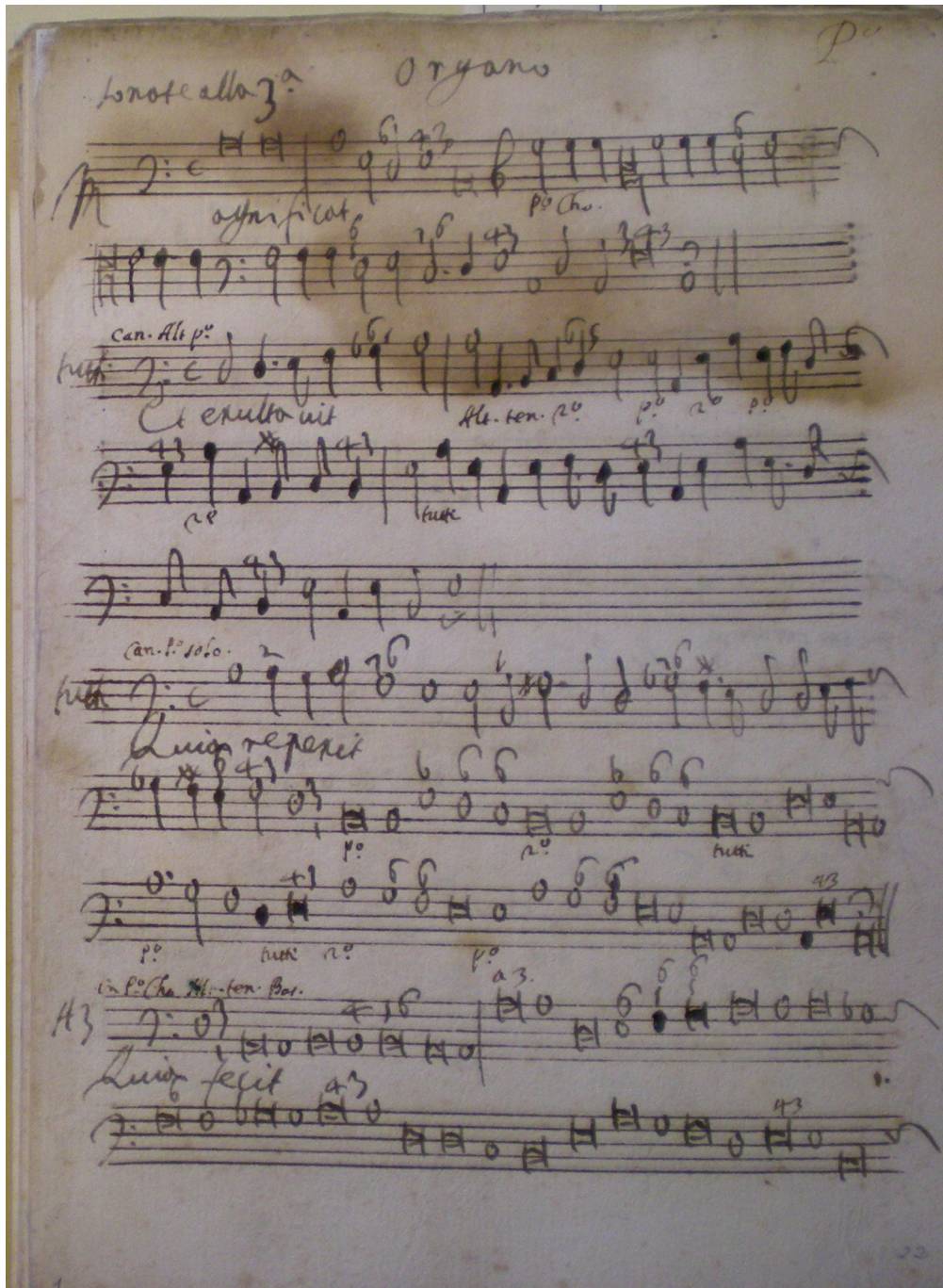
nimamea Dominum in deo
 in deo in deo salutarimeo
 in deo salutarime- o
 quia respexit
 tace

uia fecit michi magna qui potens est
 et sancti nomen eius et misericordia
 eius appropinque ament castiment-
 base um fecit potentiam di-
 sperit disperit superbo disperit
 disperit
 disperit superbo mente cordis sui
 disperit
 tace

Example C1/2

Carlo Cecchelli?, fragment of a *Magnificat* for eight “real” parts in six choirs: *Organo P[rim]o [Choro]* and *Cantus P[rim]o Choro*. I-TRfeining, F P 91/1 and F P 91/2

Courtesy of Castello del Buonconsiglio. Monumenti e collezioni provinciali, Trento

Example C1

Example C2

Cantus. *P.^o Choro*

solo

agni: fiat magni fiat animo me-

a. do= minum anima mea. do= minum

A2. & exultavit spiritus meus in deo sala-

tari meo in deo salutari meo in deo sala-

tari meo

trio

dia Respexis humilitatem ancille sue ecce enim ex-

hoc beatam beatam me dicent omnes omnes generatio-

nes Beatam me dicent omnes omnes genera-

tio: nes beatam me dicent omnes generatio: nes

Quia fecit tacet

Example D1/2

Orazio Benevoli, *Magnificat* for 16 “real” parts in four choirs: [Organo] P[rimu]s Ch[oru]s and [Cantus] P[rimu]s Cho[rus]. I-TRfeininger, F P 75/1 and F P 75/2

Courtesy of Castello del Buonconsiglio. Monumenti e collezioni provinciali, Trento

Example D1

Example D2

The few extant period scores of polychoral works apparently served, above all, for composing the works and for conserving them but not necessarily for performing itself. Interestingly, even the *maestro di cappella* directed from a complete organ part that distinguished itself from the others only through the note “p[er] me” (for me), as confirmed by numerous examples (see **Example A1**).

For all participants of the performance, this source-form bears significant consequences in terms of comprehending the musical work by reading: every singer and instrumentalist perceives the composition exclusively from an individually different detail perspective – including the maestro, obviously with the basic difference that he, especially if he is the author of the work, disposes *a priori* of an integral conception of the work as a whole.

Only the organ parts, which are usually conceived as a basso seguente, reproduce the composition at its entire length. In all the other part-books, rests are referred to by *tace*-indications (if the relative part rests during an entire section) or simple rests, which at times can extend over long periods (see **Examples A2 and 3, B2 and 3, C2, D2**); “cue notes” or other tools to facilitate difficult entries are not in use in Roman sources. The absolute certainty in counting rests, therefore, must be considered an important requisite for every single chapel member.³

Another feature of professional musicians, which may be deduced from performance materials, is a flawless mastery of metrical proportions, in particular the passage from binary (*tempo ordinario* **C**) to ternary meter (*proportio tripla* **3/1** or *sesquialtera* **3/2**) and back.⁴ As the *maestro di cappella* directed the performance from an organ part only, his role, as will be seen, consisted primarily in disposing the *tactus*, including the metric changes, although he had hardly a possibility to indicate single entries, particularly in polyphonic textures, and exert any further control on choirs that were standing far apart from his own position. Coherence between the proportion as written in the musical text and correctly executed by the performers on the one hand and the *tactus* of the maestro on the other was therefore absolutely essential for a smooth coordination, a necessity whose significance will become clearer when the spacial conditions will be considered.

- Rehearsals

Even if there are only few concrete pieces of evidence, we can assume that a permanent cappella in seventeenth-century Rome rehearsed and “studied” musical programs for liturgical use under the direction of their maestro, at least in the case of specific and particularly demanding repertoire. Not so in the case of polychoral festal music. Even though most *musiche straordinarie* were bound to annually recurring dates, the extra musicians usually were employed only a few days before the event.⁵ Polychoral performances therefore seem to have been set up with minimal

³Comparison with modern orchestral practice seems evident, as the players always perform exclusively from part-books. However, the metaphor is only partly appropriate since an orchestra player can usually count on the conductor’s indication of his entry. As we will see further on, a chapel singer in polychoral performance in terms of entries depends entirely on his written part. Only in rare cases part-books contain ‘indirect’ indications of the composer or director (e.g. the autograph note “Contate le Battute” at the beginning of each single vocal part-book of a sixteen-part Magnificat by Orazio Benevoli, see **Example D2**).

⁴According to Bontempi’s description of a young singer’s daily training, the acquisition of a sufficient knowledge in theoretical issues formed an essential part of music education (“Dopo il mezo di s’impiegaua meza hora negli ammaestramenti appartenenti alla Teorica;” see document 1, pg. 27 below).

⁵As Jean Lionnet found out, the *Libri di punti* of the papal chapel confirm that the singers who went to participate in external music productions were dispensed not more than two days before the relative appointment (Jean Lionnet, “André Maugars: Risposta data a un curioso sul sentimento della musica d’Italia,” *Nuova rivista musicale italiana* 19 [1985], n. 4, 687⁷). In the case of a rare eight-choir performance at S. Maria Maggiore in 1667, we know that the chapter of the basilica officially decided for the festal music on 3 July; the performance took place on 10 July. In this rather long period of preparation time, though, the maestro had to organize ninety singers and instrumentalists (see below).

rehearsal time. From today's perspective – and considering the complexity of many polychoral compositions – a hard to imagine undertaking. How can this be explained?

One reason may be found in the professional training of the chapel singers, in which sight-reading of difficult passages played an important role.⁶ The French musician André Maugars, who visited Rome in 1638/39, describes impressively the high degree at which Roman singers gave demonstration of this very skill – in polychoral performance.⁷

Another argument for smooth “functioning” of polychorality nearly without rehearsals may be the circumstance that chapel singers from their childhood on were made familiar with the particular rules and conditions of performance (especially those of coordination) by their master through visiting such executions as part of their basic training, but also through the active participation of the youngsters in the performances.⁸ Knowledge and experience of this manner of performance may be considered basic capacities of professional singers, acquired at an early age.

A practical means, whose particular effectiveness in polychorality should not be underestimated, is the organ's presence in every single choir. Beyond a steady intonation, the permanent sound of the continuo realization (in contrast to the immediate decay of sound by harpsichords or lutes) creates an excellent foundation, which, in the harmonical progressions, “unites” the single elements of the choral texture and thus provides optimal backing to the singers. It must be for these reasons that the organ usually is not substituted but only supported by plucked instruments.

- Direction

At the ten-choir festal music seen and heard by André Maugars at the end of the 1630's in the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva (see document 2), the individual ensembles placed on separate platforms at considerable distances from each other were coordinated by the use of a technique just as simple as efficient:⁹ each choir was disposed of its own subdirector who caught

⁶“Le Scole di Roma obligauano i Discepoli ad impiegare ogni giorno vn'hora nel cantar cose difficili e malageuoli, per l'acquisto della esperienza,” as Bontempi reports (see document 1, pg. 27 below).

⁷“[...] là où ces Musiciens Italiens ne concertent iamais, mais chantent tous leurs à l'improvisite; & ce que ie trouue de plus admirable, c'est qu'ils ne manquent iamais, quoy que la Musique soit tres-difficile” (see document 2, pp. 27-8 below).

The detailed account of André Maugars (ca. 1580-ca. 1645) is particularly important from a performance practice point of view. The author is a professional musician who in the course of his career served as a viol player at the French and English courts; his descriptions concentrate on musical questions and comprise numerous observations of highly professional value, which suggest that the account was directed to a readership particularly well versed in this field. H. Wiley Hitchcock presumes that the addressee of the publication camouflaged as a letter may be found in the circle of Jacques Champion de Chambonnières (see André Maugars, *Response faite à vn Curieux, svr le sentiment de la mvsique d'Italie. Escrite à Rome le premier Octobre 1639*, Paris?, s.n., ca. 1640; Reprint: H. Wiley Hitchcock [ed.], Genève 1993; note 2).

⁸Again Bontempi: “Gli esercitij poi fuori di Casa, erano [...] l'andare a cantar quasi in tutte le Musiche [straordinarie] che si faceuano nelle Chiese di Roma” (see document 1, pg. 27 below).

⁹Considering the space dimensions of the church and following Maugars' description, the distance between the single platforms must be presumed between 7.50 and 10 meters (or approximately 24.60 and 32.80 feet). For an examination of the performance conditions at the original venue, see Bassani, “Erkenntnis” (see note 1).

the beat of the *maestro di cappella* by eye contact and passed it synchronically and without alterations to the singers and instrumentalists standing next to him. This way it was made possible to have all choirs sing exactly according to the same meter, an operation that worked out “without dragging,” as Maugars underlines highly amazed. As demonstrated in an empirical polychoral setting, a well-going coordination can be achieved exclusively by the absolute synchronicity of the beat of all subdirectors with that of the maestro.¹⁰

As obvious and reasonable as this mode of coordination may appear, its limits are as evident. First, however, it should be explained, what exactly is meant by the “beat” and by “*maestro di cappella* conducting.” The maestro, whose place is next to the first choir, indicates the *tactus* by a bipolar up-and-down movement of the hand. Numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century textual and iconographic sources make clear that a frequent device to emphasize this movement visually over a distance was a roll of paper,¹¹ an instrument that possesses excellent characteristics for this purpose, as will be seen later on. Some elucidating details concerning coordination of a polychoral ensemble by the *maestro di cappella*’s beat are given by Lodovico Grossi da Viadana in the well known preface of his *Salmi à 4 Chori* of 1612 (see document 3, p. 28 below). According to Viadana, while indicating the beat the maestro reads permanently from the organist’s continuo part (or from a separate one, as we have already seen) and follows the course of the composition. This way he is able to signalize the relative entries to the single members of the first choir right next to him. To announce the entrance of the ripieno at tutti passages, however, “he turns the face towards all [the other] choirs, lifting up both hands, [as a] sign that all sing together.” So the tutti is indicated by a double hand beat – obviously carrying on the vertical movement. After the tutti, consequently the maestro returns to the single hand movement. As a result, it may be stated that *maestro di cappella* conducting according to Viadana (whose point of view, however, should not differ substantially from Roman practice) is limited to the essentials: the indication of the meter, the entries of the soloists of the first choir, and the signing of the tuttis. The large distances between the choir platforms and the maestro (in the mentioned ten-choir performance at S. Maria sopra Minerva such distances could amount to 40 m between the first choir and the tenth) hardly permit any influencing control of dynamics or phrasing. Considering the substantial reverberation of the room, the maestro’s beat is, apart from the musical text in the part books, the only point of reference for a functioning interaction of all persons involved.

In terms of coordination, any acoustical component may clearly be excluded. The responsibility of every single performer as symbolized by the part-book’s detail perspective, thus extends to the sphere of musical interaction, as well. This sphere is largely restricted to the choir itself, which thanks to organ and subdirector holds sufficient autonomy in terms of intonation and metric control. As a consequence of the considerable echo, the singer’s ear as a helpful means of coordination within the entirety of the choirs must be completely abandoned, a circumstance that undoubtedly manifests a fundamental difference to any other context of performance practice. Because as soon as one or more singers or players only slightly react to acoustical impressions perceived from one of the distant choirs, the metric unity of the whole is no longer guaranteed. Therefore a chapel singer from the very beginning of his musical education must have been accustomed to the fact that in polychoral performance the ear as a coordinational device plays a

¹⁰For a summary of the findings collected in the context of the above-mentioned eight-choir performance, see Bassani, “Erkenntnisse” (see note 1).

¹¹For a choice of sources on indicating the beat by baton, paper roll, or other objects, see Georg Schünemann, *Geschichte des Dirigierens* (Leipzig, 1913/Rpnt: Hildesheim, 1965), 87-90.

clearly subordinated role, whereas the visually transmitted *tactus* represents the central and irreplaceable reference of absolute priority.

The limits of this technique of coordination can easily be sketched: apart from the near impossibility to influence the performance “artistically” in a significant way (in terms of dynamics, phrasing, expression etc.), the margin for “spontaneous” alterations, among them substantial modifications of the beat, is very narrow. Consequences that such technical limitations may have on the musical results will be discussed below.

- Models and stylistic conditioning

In order to “become acquainted” with a certain composition, a seventeenth-century chapel singer depended either on self-study of the work or on witnessing its performance, even though it must be presumed that often any individual or collective approach to the work to be performed did not take place at all, whereas the performance rather occurred *prima vista*. As sheet music was usually conceived in sets of part-books, a distribution of the single and often irreplaceable parts for purposes of individual preparation would bear obvious risks and may have been not advisable for organizational and practical reasons.

According to Bontempi, listening to the performance of renowned singers – in combination with their imitation and the discussion of the experience with the teacher – was an important component of the choirboys’ education (see document 1, pg. 27 below). At the same time, it may also have caused an acquisition of new repertoire. Nevertheless, chapel life was characterized by a constant production of new compositions, apart from “classical” works like the printed masses and motets by Palestrina, Victoria or Soriano (which several chapels demonstrably possessed). Maugars even emphasizes that in Roman churches “they never sing twice the same motets” and that “every day new works” are performed.¹² Therefore, it must have been unusual for chapel singers to emulate concrete “models” or “interpretations” of a specific work in their own performance. In all probability, though, certain current standards, particularly in stylistic terms, would have to be observed; only few outstanding artistic talents (like Loreto Vittori or Marc’antonio Pasqualini in the 1630’s and 40’s) may have been able to surpass such standards – especially in solo performance – by means of an extraordinarily creative invention and highly individual expression.¹³

The great polychoral performances (particularly those with six, eight, or even more choirs) were linked to single festivities at certain important churches and often coincided with extraordinary circumstances, for instance as part of the Holy Year celebrations. Since such events

¹²See document 2 (pp. 27-8 below). Even though Maugars declares to have spent “twelve of fifteen months” in Rome (Maugars, *Response*, p. 4), his impression that “they never sing twice the same motets” must be rated highly subjective, as it contradicts the simple phenomenon of spreading and conserving musical works through printed editions (Francesco Soriano’s first book of masses from 1609 [RISM S 3982] for example, only a few years after its publication can be traced to being in the repertoire of the chapels of S. Pietro, S. Giovanni in Laterano, S. Maria Maggiore, S. Luigi dei Francesi and S. Maria della Consolazione). Furthermore, the mere state of conservation of extant performance materials often demonstrates that certain compositions (no matter if prints or manuscripts) must have been performed numerous times.

¹³Especially Vittori is exalted by his contemporaries for his particular expressiveness in vocal performance (see Giano Nicio Erythraeus [Giovanni Vittorio Rossi], *Pinacotheca imaginum illustrium doctrinae vel ingenii laude virorum qui, auctore superstite diem suum obierunt*, 3 vols., Coloniae Agrippinae, Kalcovius, 1645-1648, vol. II, 217; see also: Bianca Maria Antolini, “La carriera di cantante e compositore di Loreto Vittori,” *Studi musicali* 7 [1978], 141-88).

took place not very frequently, it can be assumed that on these occasions only very rarely the same works could be heard twice, nor a largely similar composition of participants would be found; a supposition that also considers the uniqueness of the ephemeral event as a basic aspect of Roman festal culture of the period.

It has been possible to demonstrate that a majority of Rome based *seicento* singers originated from Rome itself or from the Papal States, where they also had received their musical education.¹⁴ Therefore, a certain homogeneity between the chapels in terms of performance practice and general stylistic orientation may be assumed, determined not least by the relatively high fluctuation of maestri and singers between the individual institutions.¹⁵

Judging from Bontempi's account on Roman choirboys' musical education, the artistic influence to which a young singer was exposed during his early years under the guidance of his (only) master must have been enormous. Often the youngsters lived at their maestro's house from the age of seven or eight on and spent at least part of their day under his supervision.¹⁶ Under such conditions, it seems evident that their artistic and stylistic shaping developed on a rather narrow and well-defined track, since even the Roman singers of great fame – one of the pupils' preferred objects of study – usually came from a similar cultural environment. In particular, the above mentioned radius of geographical provenance of many Roman singers furthermore suggests that in the local music culture, external influence – in terms of aesthetics as well as performance practice – may have been rather limited.¹⁷

Apart from their aesthetical and stylistic condition, Roman singers of the period possessed a number of skills and competences that have been lost in the course of music history, and that today's historically interested singers are forced to resurrect. A brilliant example from the treasury of a chapel singer's capacities is the mastery of *Contrappunto alla mente* or *sopra il canto fermo*, which is improvised counterpoint in ensemble on a given choral melody – an obligatory requisite for job applicants to chapel service. Similarly, a reliable handling of trills and *passaggi* is

¹⁴See the study by Bernhard Schrammek, who has collected data on fifty musicians active in Rome during the seventeenth century, considering, among others, aspects such as local origin, professional training, employment and patrons (Bernhard Schrammek, *Zwischen Kirche und Karneval* [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2001], 364ff).

¹⁵Between 1600 and 1650 the chapel of S. Giovanni in Laterano changed its maestro seventeen times. In the same period of time S. Maria Maggiore saw nine, S. Luigi dei Francesi eleven, the Chiesa del Gesù even twenty-eight changes of their chapel master.

¹⁶For living conditions of young choirboys, see John Burke, *Musicians of S. Maria Maggiore Rome, 1600-1700: A Social and Economic Study*, Note d'archivio per la storia musicale, nuova serie II (Venice: Edizioni Fondazione, 1984), supplemento, chapter I, especially page 43ff.

¹⁷Pier Francesco Tosi, in his famous 1723 voice treatise, intimates that in his perception, stylistically speaking, the so-called "ancient" were those among his historical precursors, whom the writer himself was just able to remember personally (in Tosi's case for instance, Antonio Rivani "detto Ciecolino," who was active in the 1650's and 60's, i.e. during his boyhood). A singer's "overview" in stylistic and historical terms may therefore have reached back hardly more than half a century. See also Sergio Durante, "Theorie und Praxis der Gesangsschulen zur Zeit Händels: Bemerkungen zu Tosis '*Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*,'" *Händel auf dem Theater, Kongressbericht Karlsruhe 1986-1987*, ed. Hans Joachim Marx (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1988), 59-72.

illustrated by remarkable documents such as Francesco Severis *Salmi passaggiati* (1615).¹⁸ Bontempi furthermore mentions, even though in a clearly subordinated manner, the ability to play the harpsichord and to compose.

These latter aspects are evidently less important in terms of polychoral practice than the above cited and therefore will not be the subject of further discussion. Another point of relevance for the specific sonority of polychoral performance, the absence of female voices and the presence of castrati, trebles, and male altos in the timbre of the high registers will also not be discussed.

The role of the *maestro di cappella* and the *tactus*

A closer look will be taken at the specific function of the maestro, since the role of the modern “choir director,” as we already noted above, is not nearly identical. Especially in the context of polychoral practice the *maestro di cappella*, in musical terms, is the uncontested main figure of the entire event, comparable only to the overseer role of the *corago* in courtly theater culture.¹⁹ Still in the planning stage of a festal performance, his sphere of responsibility comprised first of all the fixing of the budget in agreement with the organizing authorities (the chapter of the church or the basilica’s music prefect) and if necessary, the clarification of liturgical contents of the compositions to be performed. Only on the given financials could the personnel scope of the ensemble be estimated.²⁰ Then the maestro had to provide for the polychoral composition and/or arrangement of the works (the program of an ordinary festal music consisted of first vespers, high mass, and second vespers) and to commission copyists to complete the performance materials. In accordance with the responsibilities of the church, the provision of the necessary infrastructure had to be organized, in particular the number of extra choir platforms that had to be built anew by a carpenter or would have to be taken out of the church magazines and set up in the chosen positions.²¹ Apart from the recruitment of the singers (among them some soloists from the Papal Chapel, for reasons of prestige and quality), the instrumentalists, subdirectors, and bellows-treaders, the *maestro di cappella* had to hire the organs, maybe transport them to the church, and heave them onto the platforms.²² In some cases even a coach for the journey of the papal singers to the church

¹⁸Francesco Severi, *Salmi passaggiati per tutte le voci nella maniera che si cantano in Roma sopra i falsi bordini di tutti i tuoni ecclesiastici Da cantarsi ne i Vespri della Domenica e delli giorni festivi di tutto l'Anno [...] libro primo* (Roma, N. Borboni, 1615); modern edition (ed. Murray C. Bradshaw), A-R Editions, Madison, 1981.

¹⁹On the multiple duties and responsibilities of the *corago*, see Frederick Hammond, *Music and Spectacle in Baroque Rome* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), 186.

²⁰In several cases (e.g. at S. Luigi dei Francesi and S. Maria Maggiore) payment records, usually lists of all participants that the maestro submitted to the chapter after the performance, give evidence that the authorities often refunded only a specific “round” sum, which obviously had been fixed beforehand. In case of discrepancies, the maestro obviously had to pay the remaining sum out of his own pocket. For two particularly illustrative examples, see Jean Lionnet, “La musique à Saint-Louis des français de Rome au XVII^e Siècle,” *Note d’archivio per la storia musicale*, nuova serie, III-IV (1985-1986), vol. 2, doc. 83, 86.

²¹It can be presumed that the choice of the exact positions of the platforms had to be agreed upon with the maestro.

²²The transport actions often are reported separately on the final account. These lists at times reveal that the organs were property of singers or subdirectors who themselves participated in the performance, a circumstance which in terms of logistics probably allowed slight savings on the bill.

was charged to the account as an item of extra expense. As can be seen from the accountancy of the examined church chapels, the usual mode of payment foresaw that all the expenses (salaries, rental fees, transport, copyists, paper etc.) were to be settled individually by the maestro and refunded in lump-sum by the organizing authorities only after the event and on presentation of a detailed account listing all the individual expenses.

In the context of the performance itself, the maestro firstly had to set out the single choirs. Extant lists of participants from which the distribution of the performers can clearly be deduced demonstrate that, surprisingly, a proportionally balanced division of the participants was rather an exception than the norm. On a patron saint's day at S. Luigi dei Francesi, on 25 August 1630, for instance, the performers were distributed as follows:

choir I:	5 singers, violin, lute, archlute, organ
choir II:	8 singers, violin, lute, theorbo, pandora, harpsichord, organ
choir III:	4 singers, violin, lute, organ
choir IV:	10 singers, cornetto, lute, organ
choir V:	5 singers, cornetto, 2 trombones, bassoon, violone

The fact that every choir comprises several instrumentalists represents already a departure from the "rule." More typical is the following distribution of the performers of eight-choir music on 10 July 1667 at S. Maria Maggiore, where the instrumentalists were assigned primarily to the first two choirs. Less representative is the relatively close number of singers per choir (see document 4, pp. 29-31).

choir I:	10 singers, 2 violins, lute, ²³ violone, organ
choir II:	10 singers, 2 violins, lute, organ
choir III:	10 singers, organ
choir IV:	8 singers, organ
choir V:	8 singers, organ
choir VI:	9 singers, organ
choir VII:	9 singers, violone, organ
choir VIII:	9 singers, violone, organ

Both examples basically match in the varying size of the single choirs. An obvious consequence of this distribution, which assigns the single ensembles a more or less "individual" sonority, is a perceivable distinction of the choirs from each other and thus an increased variety of timbres within the whole. Comparison of numerous extant documents (particularly singers' lists from S. Luigi dei Francesi and S. Maria Maggiore) suggests that this practice of setting up the individual choirs did not happen by chance. Rather it must be presumed that this step followed a concrete objective and was taken as part of a deliberate conception. One possible reason may be the intention to give a different timbric shape to the ripieno choirs, i.e. those ensembles that do not operate independently but appear only temporarily as a double of another choir's texture. The result would be that the listener gets acoustically "deceived," with the consequence that he does not

²³The player listed in the document simply as "Sig. Archangelo" (see document 4, pp. 29-31) may possibly be identified as the renowned lutenist Archangelo Lori (1615-1679). Similarly, also some of the other participants referred to inaccurately (as the organists of choir II, III and VI) can be traced with some probability only through comparison with other lists from the same years.

perceive consciously the doubling as such, since the doubling effect itself is compensated by a timbric enrichment of the ensemble sound.²⁴

Returning to the maestro's duties, after arranging the performers on the individual platforms, the sheet music had to be distributed. This material normally was the maestro's property and would have to be collected at the end of the performance (as usual in current chapel practice). It seems rather improbable that polychoral compositions could be rehearsed in detail considering not only the short preparation time of the event but also a number of simply technical reasons: How, for instance, should the maestro's orders be communicated to all performers in an acoustically understandable way, in regards of the often enormous reverberation time of the church?²⁵ Another problem would have been the mere organization of rehearsals, since many of the numerous participants were members of permanent chapels and had to serve there duly,²⁶ if they were not seconded expressly for the event.²⁷ Ordinary chapel service was not at all limited to Sundays only,²⁸ which must have made it practically impossible to coordinate the schedules of all individuals involved in an event organized only a few days in advance (in the above examples from 1630 and 1667 the total of the performers, including the maestro, comprised fifty-four and ninety-one persons respectively). It is much more likely that the maestro could firmly count on the high professionalism of the singers and players chosen by himself, on his own experience and on his dexterity in disposing the choirs. If at all, the polychoral works may have been sung *en bloc* just once or twice in the hours before first vespers, since only then the whole ensemble was assembled, their positions were assigned, and their roles (respectively parts) were distributed. Under these circumstances, however, "rehearsing" in a modern sense may not merely be thought of; presumably it can even be excluded completely. Indeed Maugars declares astonished when referring to polychorality, that "these Italian musicians never rehearse, but sing all their parts *prima vista*; and [...] that they never

²⁴For further considerations of this phenomenon, examining a particularly well-documented festal music at S. Luigi dei Francesi, see Florian Bassani Grampp, "On a Roman Polychoral Performance in August 1665" *Early Music*, 36/3 (August, 2008), 415-33.

²⁵According to measurements taken in recent years by Jobst B. Fricke, the reverberation in significant Roman churches proves the following: S. Luigi dei Francesi 3.6 s., S. Maria Maggiore 4.3 s., S. Giovanni in Laterano 6.4 s., S. Ignazio 8.0 s., S. Pietro 11.3 s. (see Jobst B. Fricke, "Die Raumakustik einer Kirche mit musikalischer Tradition: S. Luigi de' Francesi in Rom," *Kirchenmusik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Festschrift Hans Schmidt zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Heribert Klein (Köln 1998), 93-105: 96). During the seventeenth century, numerous polychoral performances were documented in all of these five churches.

²⁶In the performer lists, the singers' names often carry a reference to the chapel or institution they belong to as a means of distinction ("Martino di Cappella" [i.e. Cappella Pontificia], "Gio. Silvio di S. Pietro," "Giovanni del Giesù," "Simone Alto di SS. Apostoli," etc.).

²⁷Considering an average chapel size of ten, secondment must generally have been rather problematic. Even though in the case of the papal chapel such dispenses are frequently confirmed by the *Libri di punti*, it must be noted, that with a number of twenty-four permanent singers, the Cappella Pontificia would have felt the consequences of the absence of individual members less substantially than any standard chapel.

²⁸The Cappella Giulia at S. Pietro, for example, whose members appear regularly among the performers of *musiche straordinarie* at S. Luigi or S. Maria Maggiore, in 1630, was in service on 114 days of the year (see Bernhard Schrammek, "Die Kapelle im Schatten. Sozialstruktur und kirchenmusikalische Praxis der Cappella Giulia in den Jahren 1625 bis 1650" [master's thesis, Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, 1997], 94ff.).

make mistakes, although the music is very difficult and one singer from one choir often sings with one from another choir which he may have never seen nor heard.”²⁹

The coordination at the beginning of a movement, again according to Maugars, occurred as follows: “The maistre Compositeur beated the initial measure in the first choir, accompanied by the most beautiful voices.” Interestingly, the majority of extant Roman polychoral works, in terms of their beginning, can be divided into two categories: those in which the first choir begins alone, and those in which the tutti begins. Other textures for the beginning are rather scarce, which might be motivated by the particular coordination technique: in fact, the two cases represent the scenarios in which the maestro’s meter can be established most easily, ensuring a synchronized beginning. The prominent role of the first choir and the basic conditions and necessities of metrical control thus seem to be reflected even in the musical structure of the works. Lists of participants confirm that the first (and often also the second) choir were usually formed by the most prominent (and most competent) singers, and even this fact largely corresponds to the compositions: concerting textures normally comprise only the first, and at times also the second choir; the remaining ensembles appear quantitatively less exposed and fulfil less technically and musically demanding functions.

But what would the *maestro di cappella*’s beat look like? Various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises agree about its metric division and general aspect. So in binary meter (C and C), the *tactus* is indicated by a two-part vertical movement in minims (*positio-elevatio* ↓↑), whereas in the *proportio tripla* (3/1)—the most frequently found ternary meter in polychoral repertoire—it is marked in the relative proportion by a three part vertical movement in semibreves (ooo ↓↓↑) and the less frequent *proportio sesquialtera* (3/2) in minims (ddd ↓↓↑).³⁰

The question of the upbeat at the beginning of a movement, in the absence of historical descriptions or explanations, may be approached in a largely empirical way. In fact, experience suggests that in binary meter (which by the way characterizes the beginning of the majority of extant polychoral works), a single two-part movement of *positio* and *elevatio* proves to be entirely sufficient in order to transmit the *tactus* unmistakably to the subdirectors and singers, any further subdivision of the beat gesture is not necessary. By analogy, the upbeat in ternary meter is clearly and sufficiently characterized by a single three-part movement (↓↓↑).

As several other subquestions are not treated in didactic sources, subsequently further empirical findings will be illustrated. First of all, the paper roll in the maestro’s right hand, which at first glance may appear no less than an odd curiosity, reveals itself in musical practice as an excellent instrument in technical terms. Reasons for this are its lightweight and easily handled dimensions, while remaining perfectly vistance at distance due to its bright color. Enclosed by the whole hand, possibly in its middle, this static object basically functions as a “continuation of the forearm.” Physiologically speaking, however, in the simple vertical beat movement with its two turning points, forearm and hand – from the elbow to the finger roots – must be understood as a single unit, since too soft a wrist weakens the turning points of the gesture and thus diminishes the distinctness of the rhythmical impulse transported into a visual dimension. The *positio* and *elevatio* movements sign two imaginary points that in paper roll conducting are literally “beaten” by the ball

²⁹See document 2 (pp. 27-8 below).

³⁰For a basic survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century “conducting” see the historic yet highly revealing study by Schünemann (see note 11), in particular chapter IV.

of the thump or lower edge of the palm. The connection of the two, in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises, is usually illustrated as a straight line. In practice, however, a slightly curved line (arc of a circle) outlined by the hand also turns out to be very helpful because the two “stroke points” can be integrated optically even better into the movement that makes the visual transmission of the impulse gain additional clarity for the observer, respectively singer. This way, the maestro can establish the *tactus* simply by a single two- or three-part movement.

The role of the subdirector is in every respect subordinated to the maestro’s beat. Interestingly, Maugars’ description manages to grasp the chief task and the result to come up with in only a few words: the subdirector did not have to do other “than pointing his eyes to this initial beat, in order to adjust his own one to it, in such a way that all choirs sang in the same tempo without dragging.” This means that the subdirector could act entirely without sheet music and would not even need a continuo part as a means of orientation:³¹ this way, his function corresponds literally to that of monitor for the backstage choir in modern theater practice. Any autonomous influence (even indication of entries for the relative choir or any additional subdivision of the *tactus*) is neither necessary nor useful. Experience teaches that any imprecise taking over or any self-contained modification of the beat by one of the subdirectors influences the respective choir negatively and leads to discoordination and thus to an interfering shift within the overall rhythm. For obvious reasons, the *maestro di cappella* will manage to correct more easily an unintended acceleration of a single choir rather than a slowing down.

Results of *maestro di cappella* conducting

As the “historical” coordination mode of a polychoral performance examined above differs notably from current choir director conducting, a consequent application of this technique may therefore lead to musical results that vary from modern “interpretations” of *seicento* works in significant aspects.

We have already pointed out that musical practice confirms the central importance of the maestro’s beat as the only point of reference for all performers in metrical terms. Communication and, as a result of it, straight interaction of the choirs must therefore be founded on a handful of basic non-verbal conventions (e.g. the kind of upbeat described above or the “bipolarity” of the beating movement), which for the sake of communication do not allow any exception to the rule. Modifications of the tempo are indeed possible, but they are tied to certain conditions. A retardation or acceleration at a change of meter, for instance, may be realized only to a very moderate degree, as metrical proportion is laid down *per definitionem*, unequivocally for all participants, and substantial modifications could hardly be communicated. On the other hand, the transition from the end of a passage in binary meter to the beginning of another section in the same binary meter allows a slight reduction of the *tactus*.³² A clear slowing down of the beat instead is only possible at the

³¹Nevertheless, original sets of part-books at times comprise one or more extra continuo parts, whose intended purpose is the orientation of the subdirector(s), as revealed by the explicit indication “per battere,” “for beating.”

³²Interestingly, transitions from Tempo ordinario (♩) to Alla breve (♩) which would result in a distinct though not exactly definable acceleration of the *tactus*, are not to be found anywhere in the polychoral works I have examined. Possibly this (hypothetical) type of metrical coincidence has been deliberately avoided, in order to evade the resulting technical dilemma in terms of coordination.

approach of endings, where a standstill of the *tactus* is marked by a fermata on the final note. At this point, the singers expect a new upbeat for the immediately following new start, which, for technical reasons, can be given only after the maestro signs the end of the final note. However, at the conclusion of a composition, where all the ensembles usually appear in tutti, a gradual reduction of the beat can be reached without difficulty.

The above observation regarding the near impossibility of the *maestro di cappella* to communicate artistic factors in an efficient manner (especially on parameters as dynamics, phrasing, or expression) is largely confirmed by practical experience. The fundamental result of this coordination technique is a performance dominated by the functionality of the *tactus* and the clarity of its proportions and whose spectrum of rhythmical freedom turns out to be almost marginal. In comparison to a modern and relatively flexible handling of the beat on the one hand, and a subjective music perception, essentially accustomed with the “conductor’s influencing control” on the other – a quite surprising discovery.

Not less astonishing is the finding regarding the figure of the maestro: his “serving” role as the individual responsible for the musical accompaniment of a liturgical ceremony that by its nature centers on the clergy in an absolute manner is essential but clearly subordinated in the context of the event as a whole. His part is infinitely distant from the today-as-ever dominating idea of the conductor in the role of the “bold tamer” of a concert event that entirely focuses on the artistic representation of music. In the limelight of the audience’s mere ritual concentration, the conductor performs superhuman feats, which are characterized by the implicit subjectivity of his interpretation. To continue this polarization, it must be admitted, that the figure of the *maestro di cappella* in its bare functionality proves almost unexploitable from a commercial point of view. Not least for this reason, any return or introduction of this role into the modern music business must appear almost utopian.

But, do such apparent limits *de facto* diminish the artistic quality of the musical result? Interestingly, Maugars extols the Italians firstly for the fact “that they achieve quite a better order in their performances and dispose their choirs better than we do” – and quotes polychoral performance as the best example to illustrate this quality. Apart from the “better order” and the effective rhythmical coordination of the performance, which evidently represents a difference from his familiar practice, the French virtuoso’s great fascination, however, is based on the specific powers of persuasion that polychoral music executed in this way obviously releases – also in “artistic” terms. As Maugars outlines: “I have to confess to you that I have never had such a delight.” In fact, the first outcomes from our empirical study of performance conducted in the said manner reveal that (in spite of the limited flexibility of the beat, or maybe precisely for this reason) the major impression achieved by the execution is a breathtaking sense of order and control – and not at all a lack of variety or aesthetic quality. As far as can be stated at present, a serious re-discovery of this music practice will turn out to be highly rewarding as it bears an unrivaled potential of fascination and marvel, which cannot be found in any other phenomenon of sacred music.

Outlook

It may be assumed that the apparent sobriety and functionality of musical performance, as results of the central role of the *tactus*, must be understood exclusively as characteristics of polychoral practice grown from the bare technical necessity of coordinating spatially separated

ensembles. At this point, however, the opposite question must be raised as well, whether the consequences of an “amplified” *maestro di cappella* conducting might possibly reveal more common features of *stile da chiesa* or performance practice of sacred music in general, as they were parts of a “system of values” in which the maestro acted less as the “artistic director” of the performance and more as its “pilot.”

When three generations after Maugars, Johann Joseph Fux at the end of his legendary counterpoint treatise *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) briefly sketched the different styles of composition, his observations about church style concentrated on a notable series of characteristics:

[...] And because God is the highest perfection of all, the music created for his praise must be conceived as perfectly and strictly according to the rules and as accomplished as human imperfection tolerates, and it must comprehend all means that serve to arouse devotion. And even when the expression of the words may demand joyful motions, one has to pay attention that the music may not suffer any privation of the gravity which is necessary in church, and of the modesty and decorum, which would lead the listeners to other than devout emotions. [...] ³³

With these words, the *Musikdirektor* of the imperial court and, nota bene, renowned opera composer, postulates primarily compositional maxims of sacred music, which, in a figurative sense, too, can be considered effective in terms of performance. These features may appear curious to modern readers and performers insofar as they have largely disappeared from both the perception of music and performance practice of our time, and not only in terms of vocal polyphony. The clear and strict separation between church style and theater style, between sacred and profane, which obviously not only Fux points out in his teaching, as it is still overly present in early eighteenth-century writing, especially appears hardly understandable to a modern observer. If we confront this historical paradigm with current music practice, we will, in fact, note the difficulty of modern performers to find convincing solutions in distinguishing the two fields. ³⁴

This short paper is obviously not the place to discuss the reasons for the disappearance of major characteristics of sacred music described by Fux – comprising “all means that serve to arouse devotion,” “gravity [...] modesty and decorum” – from music practice, nor to point out general tendencies of modern music culture. Instead, it should be considered whether there are points of reference between Fux’s definition of church style on the one hand and the practice of *maestro di cappella* conducting on the other. More concretely: could it be that the “gravity which is necessary in church” (comprising the control of emotional expression) and the “modesty and decorum” as a fundamental feature of sacred music (especially according to its serving role in the liturgical context), which has to lead the listeners to no other “than devout emotions,” may find its expression not least in this central characteristic of performance (a characteristic that may be more than a purely technical one but an essential feature of the functionality of church music)? In other words: could it be that a substantial element of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sacred music culture is to be found in the absolute priority of the *tactus* and its metrical proportions, as an element that –

³³See document 5 (pp. 31-2; translation: FB).

³⁴When treating the “mixed style” a few pages later, Fux delineates the church style even more precisely: “I only want to remind you, Josephus, to never forget the target and the intention of church music which has to serve in order to awaken devotion in the sacred ceremonies, and not to blend it with theater style and dancing tunes, as many do. On the contrary, though, you do not have to choose meager melodies without any sparkle, believing music will turn out decently devout, which cause rather disgust than devotion; instead you must aim at an agreeable melody that can be heard with enjoyment and delight by the listener.” See document 5 (pp. 31-2 below; translation: FB).

“because God is the highest perfection of all” – manifests supreme authority in conception as well as in performance of music?

It may appear irresponsible to raise such a cardinal question without offering more than a rhetorical hypothesis. The truth is that an answer will require comprehensive research in various fields. Basic theoretical writings on the aesthetics not only of sacred music will have to be analyzed in order to gather evidence regarding the development of style as well as the practice of music reception and performance. Moreover, well-aimed empirical research with professional performers will provide further grounds, especially by experimenting with the apparent “limits” of the practice described, which may be considered as such only at the present state of knowledge.

With this in mind my considerations can be only the starting point for further reflections. The only certainties at present are the following: In the event that the above suppositions should be confirmed, our modern perception of the performance of sacred music, not only of seventeenth-century polyphony, would have to reconsider basic aspects. If the *tactus* would be assigned even on a broader basis the role it obviously holds in the context of polychorality, if the “rank” of the *maestro di cappella* with its limited sphere of influence would be revived, if established standards of performance would be re-evaluated, then our listening expectations would have to face a colossal challenge.

Documents

Document 1

Giovanni Andrea Angelini Bontempi, *Historia Musica*, Perugia, pe'l Costantini, 1695 (Reprint: Genève 1976), p. 170.

[...] Le Scole [di canto] di Roma obligauano i Discepoli ad impiegare ogni giorno vn'hora nel cantar cose difficili e malageuoli, per l'acquisto della esperienza; vn'altra, nell'esercitio del Trillo; vn'altra in quello de' Passaggi; vn'altra negli studij delle Lettere; & vn'altra negli ammaestramenti & exercitij del Canto, e sotto l'vdito del Maestro, e dauanti ad vno Specchio, per assuefarsi a non far moto alcuno inconueniente, ne di vita, ne di fronte, ne di ciglia, ne di bocca. E tutti questi erano gl'impieghi della mattina. Dopo il mezo dì s'impiegaua meza hora negli ammaestramenti appartenenti alla Teorica: vn'altra meza hora nel Contrapunto sopra il Canto fermo; vn'hora nel riceuere e mettere in opera i documenti del Contrapunto sopra la Cartella; vn'altra negli studij delle Lettere; & il rimanente del giorno nell'esercitarsi nel suono del Clauicembalo; nella compositione di qualche Salmo, o Motetto, o Canzonetta, o altra sorte di Cantilena, secondo il proprio genio. E questi erano gli exercitij ordinarij di quel giorno nel quale i Discepoli non vsciavano di Casa. Gli exercitij poi fuori di Casa, erano l'andar spesse volte a cantare e sentire la risposta da vn'Echo fuori della Porta Angelica, verso Monte Mario, per farsi giudice da se stesso de' propri accenti, l'andare a cantar quasi in tutte le Musiche che si faceuano nelle Chiese di Roma; e l'osseruare le maniere del Canto di tanti Cantori insigni che fioriuano nel Pontificato di Vrbano Ottauo; l'esercitarsi sopra quelle, & il renderne le ragioni al Maestro, quando si ritornaua a Casa: il quale poi per maggiormente imprimerle nella mente de' Discepoli, vi faceua sopra i necessarij discorsi, e ne daua i necessarij auuertimenti. Questi sono stati gli exercitij, questa, [sic] la scola che Noi sopra la Musica Harmonica [i.e. la musica d'arte] habbiamo hauuto in Roma da Virgilio Mazzocchi Professore insigne, e Maestro di Cappella di S. Pietro in Vaticano; il quale ha dato nuoui lumi a questa Scientia; [...].

Document 2

André Maugars, *Response faite à vn Curieux, svr le sentiment de la mvsique d'Italie. Escrite à Rome le premier Octobre 1639, Paris?, s.n., ca. 1640* (Reprint: H. Wiley Hitchcock [ed.], Genève 1993), p. 6-10.

[...] Outre ces grands auantages qu'ils [i.e. les italiens] ont sur nous; ce qui fait encore trouuer leurs Musiques plus agreables, c'est qu'ils apportent vn bien meilleur ordre dans leurs concerts, & disposent mieux leurs chœurs que nous, mettant à chacun d'eux vn petit Orgue, qui les fait indubitablement chanter avec bien plus de iustesse.

Pour vous faire mieux comprendre cet ordre, ie vous en donneray vn exemple, en vous faisant vne description du plus celebre & du plus excellent concert que i'aye ouy dans Rome, la veille & le iour S^t Dominique, en l'Eglise de la Minerue. Cette Eglise est assez longue & spacieuse, dans laquelle il y a deux grands Orgues esleuez des deux costez du maistre Autel, où l'on auoit mis deux chœurs de musique. Le long de la nef il y auoit huit autres chœurs, quatre d'un costé, & quatre de l'autre, éleuez sur des eschaffaux de huit à neuf pieds de haut, éloignez de pareille distance les vns des autres, & se regardans tous. A chaque chœur il y auoit vn Orgue portatif, comme c'est la coustume: il ne s'en faut pas estonner, puis qu'on en peut trouuer dans Rome plus de deux cens, au lieu que dans Paris à peine en sçauroit-on trouuer deux de mesme ton. Le maistre Compositeur battoit la principale mesure dans le premier chœur, accompagné des plus

belles voix. A chacun des autres il y auoit vn homme qui ne faisoit autre chose que ietter les yeux sur cette mesure primitiue, afin d'y conformer la sienne; de sorte que tous les chœurs chantoient d'une mesme mesure, sans traisner. Le contrepoint de la Musique estoit figuré, remply de beaux chants, & de quantité d'agreables recits. Tantost vn Dessus du premier chœur faisoit vn recit, puis celui du second, du 3^{me}, du 4^{me}, & du 10^{me} respondoit. Quelquefois ils chantoient deux, trois, quatre, & cinq voix ensemble de differens chœurs, & d'autrefois les parties de tous les chœurs recitoient chacun à leur tour à l'enuy les vns des autres. Tantost deux chœurs se battoient l'un contre l'autre, puis deux autres respondoient. Vne autre fois ils chantoient trois, quatre, & cinq chœurs ensemble; puis une, deux, trois, quatre & cinq voix seules: & au *Gloria Patri*, tous les dix chœurs reprenoient ensemble. Il faut que ie vous auoüe que ie n'eus iamais vn tel rauissement: mais sur tout dans l'Hymne & dans la Prose, où ordinairement le Maistre s'efforce de mieux faire, & où veritablement j'entendis de parfaitement beaux chants, des varietez tres-recherchées, des inuentions tres-excellentes, & de tres-agreables & differens mouuemens. Dans les Antiennes ils firent encore de tres-bonnes symphonies d'un, de deux, ou trois Violons avec l'Orgue, & de quelques Archiluths, ioüans de certains airs de mesure de Ballet, & se respondans les vns aux autres.

Mettons, MONSIEVR, la main sur la conscience, & iugeons sincerement si nous auons de semblables compositions; & quand bien nous en aurions, il me semble que nous n'auons pas beaucoup de voix pour les executer à l'heure mesme, il leur faudroit vn long temps pour les concerter ensemble; là où ces Musiciens Italiens ne concertent iamais, mais chantent tous leurs à l'improviste; & ce que ie trouue de plus admirable, c'est qu'ils ne manquent iamais, quoy que la Musique soit tres-difficile, & qu'une voix d'un chœur chante souuent avec celle d'un autre chœur qu'elle n'aura peut-estre iamais veüe ny ouye. Ce que ie vous supplie de remarquer, c'est qu'ils ne chantent iamais deux fois les mesmes Motets, encore qu'il ne passe guere iour de la semaine qu'il ne soit feste en quelque Eglise, & où l'on ne fasse quelque bonne Musique, de sorte qu'on est assuré d'entendre tous les iours de la composition nouuelle. C'est là le plus agreable diuertissement que j'aye dans Rome.

Document 3

Lodovico Viadana, *Salmi à 4 Chori*, Venezia, G. Vincenti, 1612, preface.

Modo di concertare i detti salmi a quattro chori

Il primo Choro à cinque, starà nell'Organo principale, e sarà il choro fauorito, e questo sarà cantato, è recitato da cinque buoni Cantori, che sieno sicuri, franchi, è che cantino alla moderna.

[...]

Il Maestro di Capella, starà nell'istesso [i.e. il primo] Choro à Cinque, guardando sempre su'l Basso Continuo dell'Organista, per osseruare gli andamenti della Musica, e comandar quando à da cantar' vn solo, quando due, quando tre, quando quattro, quando cinque. E quando si faranno i Ripieni, volterà la faccia a tutti i Chori, leuando ambe due le mani, segno che tutti insieme cantino.

[...]

Document 4**I-Rsm Giustificazioni I (1650-1696)**

Musici chiamati in S. Maria Maggiore p. la Messa Cantata / à 8 Chori pro gratiarum actione di Papa / Clemente Nono 10 di Luglio / 1667

[P.o Choro]

Sig.r Isidoro	sc. 1
Sig.r Verdoni	sc. 1
Sig.r Nicolino	sc. 1
Sig.r Bianchi	sc. 1
Sig.r Richi	sc. 1
Sig.r Toci	sc. 1
Sig.r Vulpio	sc. 1
Sig. Fede	sc. 1
Sig. Senesino	sc. 1
Sig. Francesco M[ari]a [Fede?]	sc. 1
Sig.r Alesandro [organista?]	sc. .60
Sig. Archangelo [Lori?] [Leuto]	sc. .60
Sig. Carlo Manelli [Violino]	sc. 1
Sig. Carlo Caproli [Violino]	sc. .50
Sig.r Michele Violone	sc. .80

2.o Choro

Sig.r D. Berardino	sc. 1
Sig. Hilario	sc. 1
Sig. Tomasso Titij	sc. 1
Sig. Borgiai	sc. .60
Sig. Filippo di S. Gio:	sc. .60
Sig. Litrico	sc. .60
Sig. Giuseppe di S. Pietro	sc. .60
Sig. Giovanni del Giesù	sc. .60
Sig. Checchino	sc. .60
Sig. Camillo	sc. .60
Sig. Fabritio [Fontana?] [organista]	sc. .60
Sig. Jacomuccio Viol[ino]	sc. .50
Sig. Giacomo di Colonna Viol[ino]	sc. .50
Sig. Antonio Arcel[euto]	sc. .50

3.o Choro

Sig.r D. Gio: batt'a	sc. 1
Sig. Tobia	sc. .60
Sig.r Leonio	sc. .60
Sig. Berard. di S. Pietro	sc. .60
Sig. Mattheo	sc. .60
Sig. Carlo di S. Luigi	sc. .60
Sig. Simone Alto di SS. Apostoli	sc. .60
Sig. Antonino	sc. .60
Sig. Silvestro	sc. .60
[Sig.] Francesco	sc. .60
Sig. Hercole [Bernabei?] [organista]	sc. .60

4.o Choro

Sig. D. Paolo	sc. .60
Sig. Tomassini	sc. .60
Sig. Ghiringhella	sc. .60
Sig. Nicolò Gratiani	sc. .60
Sig. Ignatio di S. Gio:	sc. .60
Sig. Pietro Sop.o	sc. .60
Sig. Natalino	sc. .60
Sig. Agostino	sc. .60
Sig. Organista del Giesù	sc. .60

5.o Choro

Sig. Giacomo	sc. .60
Sig. Leonardo	sc. .60
Sig. Tomasso Gabini	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: Dom.co	sc. .60
Sig. Costantino	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: batta Alto di S. Gio.	sc. .60
Sig. Paolo di Colonna	sc. .60
Sig. Domenico Sop.o di S.G.	sc. .60
Sig. Titta Marelli Org.ta	sc. .60

6.o Choro

Sig. D. Francesco Paoli	sc. .60
Sig. Onofrio	[void: member of the church chapel; bass]
Sig. Isidoro	[void: member of the church chapel; tenor]
Sig. Poste[r]la	[void: member of the church chapel; tenor]
Sig. D. Fran.co Francini	[void: member of the church chapel; alto]
Sig. Tomasso Alto di S.L.	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: batta Fede [organista]	sc. .60
[3] Soprani di Chiesa	[void: members of the church chapel; three sopranos ³⁵]

7.o Choro

Sig. Romolo	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: batta	sc. .60
Sig. Filippo dei Matthei	sc. .60
[Sig.] Filippo Trombetta	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: Paolo Monti [Madonna dei Monti?]	sc. .60
Sig. Marazza	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: batta Pecchietta Viol. [Violone?]	sc. .60
Sig. Venetianino	sc. .60
Sig. Donato	sc. .60
Sig. Colletti	sc. .60
Sig. Giacomo org.ta	sc. .60

8.o Choro

Sig. D. Fabio	sc. .60
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³⁵

In June and July 1667, the permanent chapel comprised only eleven singers: three sopranos, two altos, four tenors, and two basses; see I-Rsm Giustificazioni II (1647-1694).

Sig. D. Francesco della Trinita de' Per[egrini]	sc. .60
[Sig.] D. Giuseppe	sc. .60
Sig. Federico	sc. .60
Sig. Gio. Mattheo	sc. .60
Sig. Gio: Dom.co	sc. .60
Sig. Filippo	sc. .60
Soprano della Mad.a de Monti	sc. .60
Sop.o della Mad.a de Monti	sc. .60
Sig. Giuseppe organista	sc. .60
Sig. Antonio Violone	sc. .60
Otto organi	sc. 12
Alzamantici	sc. .35
Per Copiatura e Carta	sc. 4

[...]

1667 a 2 9bre sc. 64:65

Document 5

Johann Joseph Fux, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, Vienna, Van Ghelen, 1725 (Reprint: New York 1966), p. 242f, 273.

De Stylo Ecclesiastico.

[...] Et quia Deus summa perfectio est, decet Concentum in ejus laudem tendentem, omni legum rigore, perfectioneque, quantùm humana quidem imperfectio patitur, absolutum, omnibusque mediis ad devotionem excitandam aptis instructum esse. Et si textûs expressio quandam exigit hilaritatem, cavendum est, ne Concentus Ecclesiasticâ gravitate, modestiâ, decoreque destituatur; quo Auditores in alios, quàm devotionis affectus distraherentur. [...]

De Stylo mixto.

[...] Nisi ut moneam te, Josephe, ne obliviscaris Musicae Ecclesiasticae finis, & scopi: esse nempe devotionis excitandae, cultûsque Divini rationem: ne stylum hunc cum theatri, & saltatorio, more multorum confundas. Contrà etiam, ne opinione Musicae sacrae assumendis ideis sterilibus, nullumque succum habentibus, in fastidiosam intres morositatem, toedium potiùs, quàm devotionem parituras: sed cura tibi sit concentûs auditu grati, & in animos Auditorum cum oblectamento influentis. [...]

German edition by Lorenz Christoph Mizler, Leipzig, Mizler, 1742 (Reprint: Hildesheim 1974), p. 182, 192f.

Vom Kirchenstyl.

[...] Weil nun Gott die allerhöchste Vollkommenheit ist, so soll auch die Musik, die zu seinem Lob abgefaßt, so genau nach den Regeln und so vollkommen, als es die menschliche Unvollkommenheit leidet, eingerichtet seyn, und alle Mittel, die zur Erweckung der Andacht dienen, in sich halten. Und wenn manchemal der Ausdruck des Textes einige Freude erheischt, hat man sich in Obacht zu nehmen, daß die Musik nicht dabey an der Bedachtsamkeit, die in der Kirche nöthig ist, und an der Bescheidenheit und Zierde einigen Mangel leide, wodurch man die Zuhörer zu andern, als andächtigen Leidenschaftten bewegen würde. [...]

Vom vermischten Styl.

[...] Ich will dich [Joseph] nur erinnern, daß du niemahls die Absicht der Kirchenmusik vergessen mögest, als die bey dem Gottesdienst zur Erweckung der Andacht dienen soll, und sie nicht mit der theatralischen Schreibart und den Tanzmelodien vermengen, als wie leider viele thun. Im Gegentheile aber muß man auch nicht, in der Meinung die Musik recht andächtig zu machen, magere Gedancken nehmen, worin weder Krafft noch Safft ist, und die mehr Eckel und Verdruß als Andacht würcket; sondern auf eine solche Melodie sehen, die angenehm ist, und sich zum Vergnügen der Zuhörer vernehmen läßt. [...]