



# CODICI PER CANTARE

I LIBRONI DEL DUOMO  
NELLA MILANO SFORZESCA

A CURA DI DANIELE V. FILIPPI E AGNESE PAVANELLO

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# CODICI PER CANTARE

I Libroni del Duomo  
nella Milano sforzesca

A CURA DI  
DANIELE V. FILIPPI E AGNESE PAVANELLO

CON UN CATALOGO DEI LIBRONI  
A CURA DI CRISTINA CASSIA

LIBRERIA MUSICALE ITALIANA



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Thomas Schmidt

THE COHERENCE OF THE CYCLE?  
THE NOTATION OF THE *MOTETTI MISSALES*  
IN MANUSCRIPT AND PRINT

How does one define a «cycle»? In the creative arts, a cycle is usually defined as a group of pieces or movements/sections that form a coherent set of some kind: according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, it is the «name for series of items written to be performed as a group and sometimes linked thematically either musically or by subject, especially song-cycle».<sup>1</sup> For Benedict Taylor, in what is probably the most thorough recent discussion in a musical context, «cyclic» can either mean «a work where part of one movement is recalled in another», or «a work where separate movements are based on similar thematic material», or «a collection of miniatures, which make full sense only when considered as a whole (archetypically the Romantic song-cycle [ ... ]».<sup>2</sup> The expectation of a proper cycle, then, would seem to be that its parts are not merely combined in a temporal or occasional sense or assembled in a pragmatic collection, but that they display some sense of coherence, with a conceptual and defined relationship between the parts that is apparent to the listener or reader.

Such coherence can be established through what may be defined as extrinsic factors — such as a common text source as in a number of Romantic song cycles (such as Franz Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*) — or a functional linkage such as the four movements of a symphony or string quartet or the sections of a Bach cantata. Determining what constitutes such an extrinsic cycle is usually not difficult. We determine what parts or sections or movements belong together normally in three ways: through coherent notation in sequence in a single source; through paratexts such as titles, subtitles, indices and numberings; and through knowledge of the functional context. Thus, the extrinsic cyclicity of, say, a Beethoven symphony is established through notation in a single autograph and publication in a single edition, as well as through the title «Sinfonia» and the individual movements'

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1. S.v. «Cycle», in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music – Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e2651>>, accessed October 14, 2017.

2. See BENEDICT TAYLOR, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 6.

headings, all combined with the contextual knowledge of what number and types of movements make up a typical representative of the genre in the decades around 1800.

Such extrinsic cyclicality however, was deemed insufficient from the late eighteenth century onwards, in an era of the work of art emanating as one organic whole from the spirit of genius, where Robert Schumann clamoured: «now we ask for ideas, inward connection, poetic unity, the whole bathed in fresh fancy».<sup>3</sup> The cycle, as conceived in the Classic-Romantic spirit, had to be internally as well as externally determined: through consistency of themes, motifs, structure, all held together by an overarching creative concept or poetic idea. Identifying and discussing these aspects of the intrinsic cycle — and their relationship to the extrinsic cycle — has been a veritable obsession by critics and scholars alike ever since.<sup>4</sup>

What about the mass then? Extrinsically, its cyclic nature is pre-determined by the liturgy, with the same sections in the same order every time, identical in text for the ordinary every time and changing in an equally extrinsically determined calendric cycle for the propers. For the polyphonic mass ordinary around 1500 specifically, further criteria accrue. While mass ordinary polyphony of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries is normally transmitted as single movements or as pairs, thus apparently not conceived as an extrinsic, much less an intrinsic cycle, the norm around 1500 is the transmission of all five movements of the polyphonic ordinary together in sequence, omitting all other parts of the mass and thus removing the settings in terms of their material presentation and conservation from their immediate liturgical context. The ‘cyclic mass’ that emerges has attracted attention principally through its perceived intrinsic features (the extrinsic ones taken as a matter of course): through composers establishing coherence of the five ‘movements’ by way of a shared cantus firmus or (slightly later) a polyphonic model. The resulting narrative of the cyclic mass as a large-scale organically conceived work — the *cantus magnus*, in Johannes Tinctoris’s terms — has permeated the historiography of Renaissance music since the nineteenth century, culminating, somewhat provocatively, in David Fallows arguing for the cantus firmus mass as a *forme fixe*, a cycle conceived in primarily musical terms and fulfilling certain generic norms as a composition.<sup>5</sup>

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3. ROBERT SCHUMANN, *Variations for the Pianoforte: Second Course* [1836], in *Music and Musicians. Essays and Criticisms by Robert Schumann*, trans. and ed. by Fanny Raymond Ritter, vol. II, William Reeves, London 1880, p. 435.

4. See again TAYLOR, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory*; also LAURA TUNBRIDGE, *The Song Cycle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011 (Cambridge Introductions to Music), pp. 1–22.

5. DAVID FALLOWS, *The Last Agnus Dei, or: The Cyclic Mass, 1450–1600, as Forme fixe*, in *Polyphone Messen im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert: Funktion, Kontext, Symbol*, hrsg. von Andrea Ammendola, Daniel Glowotz und Jürgen Heidrich, v&r unipress, Göttingen 2012, pp. 53–63. Fallows builds on the traditional approach epitomised by LUDWIG FINSCHER, *Die Messe als musikalisches Kunstwerk*,

The rootedness of this approach in German idealist philosophy and historiography of the nineteenth century and the problematic nature of its projection back onto polyphony of the late Middle Ages has been highlighted by Andrew Kirkman who points to August Wilhelm Ambros and his *Geschichte der Musik* in 1864 in particular.<sup>6</sup> Christiane Wiesenfeldt has additionally pointed to the vibrant tradition of Marian masses of the same period — which are based on non-cyclical sequences of individual chants — as well as to the continuing tradition of individually transmitted single mass movements throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> These historiographical tensions notwithstanding, the extrinsic cyclicity of the polyphonic mass ordinary around 1500 remains beyond doubt. Regardless of whether and to what degree musical coherence is established by compositional means, the rule from the last third of the fifteenth century onwards is the transmission of all five movements together. Additionally, in both manuscript or in print, collections are increasingly organised by genre, with the polyphonic ordinary being amongst the most popular; readers and performers would have come to expect full five-movement sets in books they bought or used, whether or not all movements would be performed polyphonically at all in a given liturgical tradition. This coherence is indicated visually and paratextually as well. The Kyrie on the first page or opening is regularly highlighted in manuscripts as well as printed editions through larger initials or more elaborate illumination indicating a new beginning, with the openings of subsequent movements clearly subordinate;<sup>8</sup> titles referring to the model or function of the mass, where they are supplied, appear only above or within the Kyrie again evidently introducing the entire cycle; the same applies to tables of contents or indexes.

The very fact that Ottaviano Petrucci could from the outset of his publishing career disseminate anthologies laconically titled *Misse Josquin*, *Misse Obrecht* etc. indicates an expectation that his audience knew these titles to refer to entire five-movement polyphonic cycles. Even his *Fragmenta missarum* volume of 1505, while continuing the tradition of single mass movements and acknowledging that

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in *Die Musik des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, hrsg. von Ludwig Finscher, vol. I, Laaber Verlag, Laaber 1989 (Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, 3), pp. 193–275.

6. ANDREW KIRKMAN, *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass: Medieval Context to Modern Revival*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 3–25; see also his *The Invention of the Cyclic Mass*, «Journal of the American Musicological Society», LIV/1 2001, pp. 1–47: 9–20.

7. See CHRISTIANE WIESENFELDT, *Majestas Mariae. Studien zu marianischen Choralordinarien des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2012 (Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft, 70), pp. 18–26.

8. On hierarchies of initials articulating musical structure, see THOMAS SCHMIDT, *Making Polyphonic Books in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries*, in *The Production and Reading of Music Sources: Mise-En-Page in Manuscripts and Printed Books Containing Polyphonic Music, 1480–1530*, ed. by Thomas Schmidt and Christian Thomas Leitmeir, Brepols, Turnhout 2018, pp. 3–100: 93–4.

such movements were deemed separately marketable, reveals through its very title that the pieces contained in this publication were not in themselves complete, but fragments. The conceptual whole remains the five-movement cycle of which the individual movements are parts — even regardless of whether a whole cycle had ever been composed. A polyphonic Credo, even if transmitted individually, would have been understood implicitly not only as occupying the place between the Gospel reading and the Offertory within the mass liturgy, but also as the third movement of a five-part musical entity, whether indicated as such in the transmitting source(s) or not.

None of this is the case for the *motetti missales*, and this points to the fundamental difficulty in identifying them and situating them in a specific context of transmission and function. How can you tell whether a short motet on a devotional text is part of such a cycle or whether it isn't? In a sense, the process works the other way around. A movement of a mass ordinary cycle can be de-contextualised — as a *fragmentum missae* — by appearing in a different context, thus being converted from a liturgical into a devotional or pedagogical setting. Conversely, only through a specific kind of grouping and presentation do motets of a certain type assume the *loco Missae* function. In fact, quite a few of the pieces we know as *motetti missales* do appear as individual compositions outside of that context,<sup>9</sup> and when they do so, it is (in contrast to a mass ordinary movement) impossible to identify them as such, nor is there any indication, paratextual or otherwise, that the compiler of the source did so.

There are a number of circumstantial characteristics which might help us determine whether a group of short motets might be a *motetti missales* cycle: transmission in certain types of sources, groupings of certain types of settings (that is, settings of short devotional texts) possibly connected by a common text source or at least very similar texts; shared modality, texture and cleffing; and potentially the inclusion of a declamatory post-elevation motet in homophonic block chords.<sup>10</sup> These characteristics have also triggered numerous attempts to identify 'hidden' or partial cycles, such as are not identified paratextually and do not share all the textual characteristics or which do not contain the allegedly 'correct' number of

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9. A full record of transmission of all relevant pieces and cycles is found at <<http://www.motetcycles.ch>>.

10. On the textual and musical characteristics of the *motetti missales* cycles, see the seminal study by THOMAS L. NOBLITT, *The Ambrosian «Motetti Missales» Repertory*, «Musica Disciplina», XXII 1968, pp. 77–103: 85–93. Also the summary in LUDWIG FINSCHER, s.v. «*Motetti missales*», in MGG<sup>2</sup>, *Sachteil* vol. VI, Bärenreiter – Metzler, Kassel – Stuttgart 1997, coll. 549–52. On the elevation motets, see AGNESE PAVANELLO, *The Elevation as Liturgical Climax in Gesture and Sound: Milanese Elevation Motets in Context*, «Journal of the Alamire Foundation», IX/1 2017, pp. 33–59.

movements.<sup>11</sup> But the only way to be absolutely sure whether a group of motets is a *loco Missae* cycle is paratextual: by the source explicitly marking it out as such through titles, rubrics, or in a table of contents. Thomas Noblitt himself considered such paratextual designations to be necessary prerequisites for considering a group of motets as a definite cycle. But the situation is much less clear than one might hope for and Noblitt implies: the designations are inconsistent and incomplete even in those codices where they are present at all — see Table 1 which lists those cycles that are considered secure, including their paratexts and transmission.

If we begin with the core repertoire as transmitted in the Milanese Libroni, we find that the notation itself and the paratexts surrounding are far from providing unambiguous evidence of coherence. For example, the first cycle in Librone 1, Gaffurio's *Salve mater salvatoris*, begins on fol. 84v merely with the indication of the composer above the first motet. But this ascription — *F. Gafforus* — is identical to that above the previous motet, *Salve decus genitoris* (fols. 82v–84r), as is the disposition of the initials, with two larger, flourished capitals for the superius and altus, as opposed to much smaller initials below the stave and voice designations in the left-hand margin for the lower voices tenor and bassus (see Figg. 1 and 2). Likewise, both pieces end in exactly the same fashion. *Salve decus* spans two openings, with *custodes* at the end of the notation on the first opening clearly indicating that the *Qui nepotes plus quam natos* on fols. 83v–84r is a *secunda pars* rather than a self-contained piece, while at the end of the second opening all voices conclude with a decorated final barline. That same decorated barline then appears at the end of all constituent motets of the *Missae* cycle which themselves extend over one to three openings, multi-opening motets again internally held together by *custodes* and sometimes *verte (folium)* instructions.

Even the cleffing and tonality of *Salve mater salvatoris* and the preceding *Salve decus genitoris* are identical, and the structure of their texts very similar, in both cases hymn or sequence poetry in rhythmical eight- and seven-syllable lines. Although a closer look at the text reveals that *Salve decus* is addressed explicitly at Ludovico Sforza himself which seems to preclude the possibility that the setting could have functioned *loco Missae*, even in the context of the liturgy of the ducal court, there is nothing to indicate to the reader from the way it is notated and from the type of setting that *Salve decus genitoris* is a self-contained piece while the subsequent *Salve*

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11. Ludwig Finscher suggested the existence of further (partial or complete) cycles in the Libroni 1 and 3; see LUDWIG FINSCHER, *Loysel Compère (c.1450–1518): Life and Works*, American Institute of Musicology, [Rome] 1964 (Musicological Studies and Documents, 12), p. 90. A further systematic and highly instructive attempt to identify such cycles for the severely damaged Librone [4] is LYNN HALPERN WARD, *The «Motetti Missales» Repertory Reconsidered*, «Journal of the American Musicological Society», XXXIX/3 1986, pp. 491–523. Other authors have followed suit — see the bibliography in <<http://www.motetcycles.ch>>.