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Editors

Michael Fjeldsøe · fjeldsoe@hum.ku.dk

Peter Hauge · ph@kb.dk

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Address

c/o Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Section of Musicology,
University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Vej 1, DK-2300 København S

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An experiment in musical unity, or: The sheer joy of sound. The anonymous *Sine nomine* mass in MS Cappella Sistina 14

Peter Woetmann Christoffersen

In his book *The Rise of European Music 1380–1500* Reinhard Strohm introduces the cyclic cantus firmus mass as the most outstanding genre of sacred polyphony in the later part of the fifteenth century in terms of numbers of settings as well as of the artistic effort involved: ‘The genre was obviously concerned with the problem of musical unity, or rather, diversity within unity.’¹ In the following I want to take a closer look at a mass dating from the decade just after 1450, the *Missa Sine nomine* in MS Cappella Sistina 14, in which the anonymous composer was intensely involved with the problem of unity, so involved that he – according to our ideas about music – has focused on ‘unity’ to such a degree that it became rather to the detriment of ‘diversity.’² Apparently, his ambition was to create a sounding ‘unity’, that is, a unity incorporating all the five ordinary settings of the cyclic mass that was immediately perceptible by hearing alone. I think that most of today’s listeners and readers will agree that the mechanical construction of his mass, its simplistic musical language and not least its repetitiveness make it a bit unappealing in the role of a musical work of art. Obviously, the contemporary assessment of the mass was different as compilers of prestigious choirbooks included it in their repertoires, and this fact puts our aesthetic understanding of the period’s music to test. In addition to the classical analysis of how such a cantus firmus mass is structured as a musical architecture transmitted in writing, we have to ponder how it served as a sounding reality, and how it may have related to the little we know about the musical practices of the period.

Context, sources and origin

The polyphonic mass cycle emerged as an important musical genre during the first half of the fifteenth century. Beginning with pairs of settings of mass ordinary items, which were sung in close succession during Mass such as Gloria and Credo as well as

- 1 Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music 1380–1500* (Cambridge, 1993), 228. Strohm’s book tells among many other things the story of the early mass cycles, which is summarized in the following paragraphs, and it contains references to the classical literature on the subject.
- 2 The mass is readily available in my online edition, *The anonymous Missa Sine nomine in MS Cappella Sistina 14. Edited with an introduction by Peter Woetmann Christoffersen* (http://sacred.pwch.dk/Ma_An01.pdf). Furthermore, it has appeared recently in two printed editions: Reinhard Strohm (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music VI. Mass Settings from the Lucca Choirbook. Transcribed and edited by Reinhard Strohm* (Early English Church Music 49; London, 2007), 98–133, and Richard Sherr (ed.), *Masses for the Sistine Chapel. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cappella Sistina, MS 14. Edited and with an Introduction by Richard Sherr* (Monuments of Renaissance Music XIII; Chicago, 2009), 273–315.

Sanctus and Agnus, a cycle of five ordinary settings (including the Kyrie) crystalized in the second quarter of the century. The polyphonic settings making up a cycle might be united by a shared voice disposition, shared rhythmical and formal layouts and by recurrent motifs or polyphonic modules. A simple way to unite the mass sections was to let each section begin with the same music or variations of it, functioning as a *motto* or head-motif, which was easy to recognize by hearing alone; also subsections could have secondary *mottos*.

The *motto masses* often were freely composed and without any connection to a designated feast or saint, therefore they today appear in lists of named masses as *missae sine nomine*, masses without names. In another type of mass a different sort of unity was obtained by setting the liturgical tunes belonging to the five ordinary songs in a plainchant mass. Both types of mass continued during the fifteenth century. During the late 1440s, however, the main focus of the musicians shifted towards another type of mass, which had developed in England, the *tenor mass*.

Composers had begun to expand the technique of the motet with a repeated cantus firmus in the tenor voice to include the whole mass ordinary. In addition to shared voice disposition and the presence of head-motifs, the unity of the polyphonic mass was immensely strengthened by a fixed pattern of mensurations connected to the repeats of the same tenor in all mass sections. The use of a pre-existent tune in the tenor, the cantus firmus, a sacred or – in later masses – a secular tune, provided the mass with a name and attached it to a specific function in the liturgy, to a feast or a class of feasts, or it made it fit to adorn an important courtly or civic event, or the choice of a tune simply reflected the preferences of a patron instituting a sacred service.

Most mass music was composed for three voices with the tenor as the generally lowest sounding voice. An English mass of the 1440s composed for four voices turned out to be of enormous influence on the development of the genre. Its anonymous composer used as his tenor a strict rendering of the long melisma on the final word ‘caput’ in the antiphon ‘Venit ad Petrum’ for Maundy Thursday, which is found in liturgical sources from England and France from this period.³ This Mixolydian tune begins on and insistently returns to the note *b*-natural, which in the diatonic scale system of the Guidonian hand could not sound combined with a fifth above – the tune was singularly unfit for a polyphonic setting with the tenor as the fundamental voice. The solution was to add a free voice, a low contratenor, below the tenor, which offered the composer freedom to control and vary the harmonies in the now four-part texture. This made it possible for this type of cantus firmus masses to obtain a clearer identity, and it anchored it in the tradition of the motet with its rhythmical manipulation of the repeated tenor tune as well as making its sound distinct from other mass types.

3 Concerning its place in the liturgy, an analysis of the tune and its transformation into a mass tenor, see Manfred F. Bukofzer’s classical study ‘Caput: A Liturgico-Musical Study’ in his book *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music* (New York, 1950), 217–310.

Missa Caput was a resounding success. It appears in sources copied in England, Flanders, Southern Germany and in North Italian Trent, which testify to a wide and varied early circulation of the mass. In two Trent manuscripts (MSS Trent 88 and 89) it even was mistakenly attributed to ‘Duffay’ (Guillaume Du Fay) and was long regarded by modern musicology as a central work by the most prominent composer of the period.⁴ A short time later, another anonymous English mass, almost a twin of *Missa Caput*, the *Missa Veterem hominem* began to circulate on the Continent. Their influence on the Continental mass repertory was unmistakable.

Some musicians expanded the *Caput* model into brilliant concepts, which defined new developments of the mass cycles for the next generation. This is what we, for example, meet in Petrus de Domarto’s *Missa Spiritus almus*, in Guillaume Du Fay’s *Missa Se la face ay pale* or in Johannes Ockeghem’s *Missa Caput*, which all seem to be created under the spell of the early triumphal progress of the English *Missa Caput*.⁵ Other named or anonymous musicians emulated the model during the next decade without quite the same degree of originality.⁶ Christopher Page has said it very clear: ‘In fact the structure and layout of *Caput* and *Veterem hominem* became the blueprint for a spate of four-voice Continental Masses in the 1450s, some of which clone their models so comprehensively that it is difficult or even impossible to determine whether their composers were English or Continental.’⁷ *Missa Sine nomine* belongs to the group of followers of the *Caput* model.

4 It was included in Guillaume Dufay (ed. H. Besseler), *Opera omnia I–VI* (Corpus mensurabilis musicae 1; American Musicological Society, 1951–1966), vol. III, 33; see further Alejandro Enrique Planchart, ‘Guillaume Dufay’s Masses: Notes and Revisions’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 58 (1972), 1–23, and Reinhard Strohm, ‘Quellenkritische Untersuchungen an der Missa “Caput”’, in Ludwig Finscher (ed.), *Datierung und Filiation von Musikhandschriften der Josquin-Zeit. Quellenstudien zur Musik der Renaissance II* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 26; Wiesbaden, 1983), 153–76.

5 On the development of cantus firmus techniques through canon prescriptions and mensural and proportional manipulation, see Rob C. Wegman, ‘Petrus de Domartus’s *Missa Spiritus almus* and the early history of the four-voice mass in the fifteenth century’, *Early Music History*, 10 (1991), 235–303.

6 The study of this repertory has been greatly facilitated by the publication of Rebecca L. Gerber (ed.), *Sacred Music from the Cathedral of Trent. Trent, Museo Provinciale d’arte, Codex 1375 (olim 88)*, (Monuments of Renaissance Music XII; Chicago, 2007). The MS Trent 88 was copied in Trent during the years 1456–1460/61 and contains a repertory from the 1440s and the first part of the 1450s. Especially the representation of anonymous polyphony for the Proper as well as the Ordinary is overwhelming and produces a much more balanced impression of the music of the period than the complete works of known composers.

All the masses mentioned (except for *Sine nomine*) are present in Trent 88 and edited by Gerber: *Veterem hominem* (no. 1), *Caput* (no. 11, Kyrie and Agnus dei only, for a complete edition see latest Strohm, *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music*, 46–81), *Se la face ay pale* (no. 29), Ockeghem, *Caput* (no. 98), *Spiritus almus* (no. 143).

7 Booklet for *Missa Veterem hominem. An anonymous English Mass setting from c1440* (The Spirits of England and France 5). Gothic Voices directed by Christopher Page. Hyperion CDA66919 (1997).

Missa Sine nomine is preserved complete in one source only. It appears in a very large, illuminated choirbook on paper, Rome, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Cappella Sistina 14 (hereafter *Rome CS 14*), where it is found fols. 65^v–75. It stands like something of a misfit among masses by famous composers whose music has attracted far more interest: Du Fay (three masses), Regis (two masses), Domarto, Vincenet, Eloy d'Amerval, Busnoys, Ockeghem, Caron, Faugues, Weerbecke and Wrede – all witnessing the dominance of French-Flemish music in leading Italian institutions.⁸ It is the only mass in the Vatican manuscript not identified by a written composer ascription or a title.⁹ Only a large painted letter 'K' with a depiction of God the Father with the Book of Life functions as a visual marker at the start of the Kyrie.¹⁰ MS Rome CS 14 was probably created at the end of the 1470s in Naples, Ferrara or Rome for a wealthy sacred institution or as an expensive gift, and it ended up in the then new papal institution, the Sistine Chapel, some years before 1487. It contains a carefully selected repertory of masses from the preceding 25 years, quite retrospective in nature, representing exactly the sort of music that Johannes Tinctoris knew and commented upon in his series of treatises written in Naples during the 1470s. The selection of repertory for the big choirbook may very well have been strongly influenced by Neapolitan circles.¹¹

The other source for *Missa Sine nomine* consists of a single folio, which on its front side has the high contratenor and the tenor of the final sections of its Credo, and on its reverse side the beginnings of the highest voice and the 'Contra bassus' of the Sanctus. The folio once formed part of a choirbook belonging to the cathedral of Lucca. Today only a collection of more or less connected bifolios and single sheets remains, because the book in the early seventeenth century was dismembered and used as binding materials for account books. Pieces of the manuscript are found in other archives, and new may still turn up, but the main corpus is preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Lucca as MS 238 (hereafter *Lucca 238*). Reinhard Strohm identified the fragments in 1963,

8 Cf. Sherr, *Masses*, 26–45, and Adalbert Roth, *Studien zum frühen Repertoire der päpstlichen Kapelle unter dem Pontifikat Sixtus' IV. (1471–1484). Die Chorbücher 14 und 51 des Fondo Cappella Sistina der Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana* (Capellae apostolicae sistinaeque collectanea acta monumenta 1; Città del Vaticano, 1991), 471–83. The MS can be visited online at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Capp.Sist.14.

9 *Missa Puisque je vis* on fols. 161^v–171 is anonymous too, but has a title. Therefore, to name our mass 'Missa Sine nomine in CS 14' constitutes an unambiguous identification of it among the multitude of *missae sine nomine* in other sources.

10 Reinhard Strohm has tried to identify the miniature as a representation of St Andrew, the patron saint of the house of Valois (*Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, (rev. ed.; Oxford, 1990), 126–27. That is why he refers to this mass as *Missa [de Sancto Andrea?]* in this book p. 165 and in *The Rise of European Music*, 430. Roth has convincingly refuted this identification in his *Studien*, 118.

11 Cf. John D. Bergsagel, 'Tinctoris and the Vatican Manuscripts Cappella Sistina 14, 51 and 35', *Collectanea II. Studien zur Geschichte der Päpstlichen Kapelle. Tagesbericht Heidelberg 1989* (Capellae apostolicae sistinaeque collectanea monumenta 4; Città del Vaticano, 1994), 497–527.

and he has reconstructed the manuscript and its provenance. It was a costly production, written on large format parchment and embellished with illuminated initials, and Strohm proposes that the choirbook was created for use in the chapel of the English Merchant Adventurers in the Carmelite friary in Bruges during the years 1463–64.¹² A few years later, the banker Giovanni Arnolfini acquired the choirbook and donated it to the choir school of the cathedral in his hometown Lucca. Arnolfini died in 1472, so the transference of the choirbook to Lucca must have happened around 1470. Its original repertory consisted of 14 masses and a smaller group of motets from the preceding decades by English musicians (masses by Henry Thick, Walther Frye and several anonymous including *Missa Caput*) and by Continental musicians (including Domarto's *Missa Spiritus almus* and Du Fay's *Missa L'homme armé*).

Missa Sine nomine must have enjoyed a circulation that was much wider than these two sources suggest. Even if only a very small part of it is preserved in Lucca 238, we can establish that the manuscripts belonged to different transmission traditions, and that the younger source, Rome CS 14, probably represents the original version of the mass. The single folio of Lucca 238 contains the complete high contratenor of the duos, which begin the second half of the Credo, and this permits us to reconstruct the Lucca version of them.¹³ As in many other Credo-settings of the mid-fifteenth century, *Sine nomine* omits some sentences of the Credo text. In Rome CS 14 words and music fit like fingers in glove, while it in Lucca can be difficult to place the words. The selection of sentences has here been revised in order to include the words 'qui ex patre filioque procedit', which were central to a long-standing controversy between the Eastern and Western churches concerning the understanding of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ This shows that in the North the mass circulated in a version, where someone before the early 1460s had found it important to take the trouble to revise the text of the Credo in order to include the controversial word 'filioque'.

Nearly every scholar who has commented on *Missa Sine nomine* has assumed that it was of English origin. There are some good reasons for this view, first and foremost its very long setting of the Kyrie, its placement among English masses in MS Lucca 238, and the appearance of certain 'English' cadential formulas. Its Kyrie could in fact

12 On its provenance, see Reinhard Strohm, 'Alte Fragen und Neue Überlegungen zum Chorbuch Lucca (Lucca, Archivio di Stato, Biblioteca Manoscritti 238 = I-Las 238)'; in Ulrich Konrad (ed.), *Musikalische Quellen – Quellen zur Musikgeschichte. Festschrift für Martin Staehelin zum 65. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 2002), 51–64. A facsimile edition has been published by Reinhard Strohm, *The Lucca Choirbook: Lucca, Archivio di Stato, MS 238; Lucca, Archivio Arcivescovile, MS 97; Pisa, Archivio Arcivescovile, Biblioteca Maffi, Cartella 11/III* (Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Music in Facsimile II; Chicago, 2008). A partial facsimile is available online at <https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/196/#/images>; this does not include the folio with *Missa Sine nomine*.

13 The Lucca version of the duos is published in the Appendix to my online edition.

14 Cf. Ruth Hannas, 'Concerning Deletions in the Polyphonic Mass Credo', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 5 (1952), 155–86.

have had a nine verse Kyrie-trope, a prosula, as its original text, just like it is the case with the English masses *Caput* and *Veterem hominem*; in Lucca 238 *Missa Caput* has retained its prosula text. In the introduction to my online edition of the mass, I have discussed the question of its Englishness in some detail.¹⁵ My conclusion is that it is most probable that *Missa Sine nomine* was composed in Northern France or in Burgundian Flanders by a musician who had personal experiences of the English masses and who had sung the masses *Caput* and *Veterem hominem* and probably several other English works at services around 1450, during the years when these masses were widely admired and emulated on the Continent. The many English traits in the mass are results of the composer's decision strictly to adhere to a simplified version of the *Caput* model, and of – as we shall see – direct quotations. Here I find myself in agreement with Strohm who seems to maintain his early characterization of the mass as 'Burgundian', even if he included the mass in his volume of *Early English Church Music*.¹⁶

The anonymous composer reacted to the *Caput* model in a similar way as contemporary colleagues, but the sound of his efforts became different. Composers from this part of Europe grabbed the *Caput* model and created new types of masses: Petrus de Domarto instituted an influential use of mensural transformation of the tenor tune in *Missa Spiritus almus*, Guillaume Du Fay perfected the proportional transformation in *Missa Se la face ay pale*, and Johannes Ockeghem in his early *Caput* mass borrowed the *Caput* tenor more or less as written in the English mass, transposed it down an octave in order to let it sound at the bottom of the texture, and thereby defied the whole idea of the *Caput* model. The anonymous composer of *Missa Sine nomine* made his contribution in the same spirit as his colleagues. It has been difficult for modern musicology to realize this, because the obviousness of its many English traits routinely has placed the mass in a different category.

The music of the mass, its tenor tune and layout

Missa Sine nomine is composed for voices having the same ranges in all the five settings: The tenor has a range of an octave (*f-f'*) only. The two contratenors share this range, but add respectively a third above (*f-a'*) in the high one (altus) and a fourth below (*c-f'*) in the low voice, named 'Contra' in Rome CS 14. This quite compact complex of grown male voices is supplemented by a superius, usually performed by boys, which moves between a fifth and an octave above the tenor (*c'-e''*). The total range of the mass, *c-e''*, lies comfortably within the Guidonian Hand, and it may easily be set at a lower pitch to enable a performance by grown up voices alone.

15 Christoffersen, *The anonymous Missa Sine nomine*, Introduction, pp. xvi–xxi. Concerning the sources, the tenor tune and the layout, this introduction contains more detailed discussions and bibliographic references than space permitted in the present article.

16 Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, 95, and *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music*, p. x.

In Kyrie, the beginning of which is shown in *Ex. 1*, only the tenor has a key signature of one flat, which signals that the part has to be performed with a combination of the soft hexachord on *f* and the natural hexachord on *c'* as the default choice. In Rome CS 14 the tenor has this one-flat signature in all the settings. The superius is without any signature all the way through, but exhibits several accidentals that signal hexachordal shifts. Signatures with or without a b-flat changes constantly in the two contratenors. They are not inconsistent in notation, even if we cannot exclude a few copying errors, rather, in most cases they are practical. If a flat would govern a very few notes only, it does not appear on the staves. On the single folio left of the mass in Lucca 238, the high contratenor has a one-flat signature, where Rome CS 14 has none. It makes no difference for the performance of the music, as the hexachordal positions are unmistakable.

The constant oscillation between F- and G-hexachords, causing a fluctuation between B-natural and B-flat, is a characteristic of the music of the mid-fifteenth century. If we study *Ex. 1*, the Kyrie opens with a duo in free polyphony for the two highest voices. The superius sets out in an inverse melodic curve within the combined *g'*- and *c'*-hexachords with a counter voice based entirely on the *c'*-hexachord, and of course the first phrase ends in a cadence to C. The next phrase forces the superius into the combined *f'*-*c'*-hexachords, while the altus voice jumps into the *f*-hexachord, and accordingly the duo ends with a cadence on F. Now a new duo between the two contratenors takes over, in F, with chains of parallel thirds and sixths. When the duo nears a cadence to C in bar 21, the voices seem to get struck on a unison imitation of a small motif, formed by the main notes of the F-hexachord: *c'-d'-c'-a-f*, which occupies both voices in bars 20–23, before they run on to the cadence to C. This motif, which I have named 'x', is to become of great importance for how we hear the mass.

When the tenor comes in bar 28 on *c'*, the other three voices dress it in consonant harmony. Not so much by singing counter melodies as by presenting steps consonant with the tenor notes as well as with each other, enlivened by passing notes. The low contra keeps mostly below the tenor and moves often in leaps between fundamentals of triads, more or less functioning as a real bass voice. Only when the tenor rests or holds a long note, the melodic profiles of the two contratenors may become stronger, more linear (bars 38–39, for example). The highest voice seems to be added to the rather self-contained structure of the three voices in the tenor range. After its melodic swing in the first duo it becomes curiously restricted, almost keeping within one single hexachord at the time. It goes back and forth within either the sixth *f'-d''* (bars 28–33 and 35–37) or the sixth *g'-e''* (bars 34–36 and 39–45), inserting cadential movements wherever they may fit.

When the tenor reaches *f'* in bars 32–33, the music comes to a standstill, while the superius and the altus make a short imitation of the x-motif at the octave. The superius succeeds in getting this motif placed again in bars 36–37. This melodic dependency on motifs and lines formed by a changing array of hexachords must be a trait derived from

Ex. 1, *Missa Sine nomine*, Kyrie, bars 1–46

[Superius] Mensura = ♩

[Altus]

Tenor

Contra

Ky - ri -

e e - ley -

son,

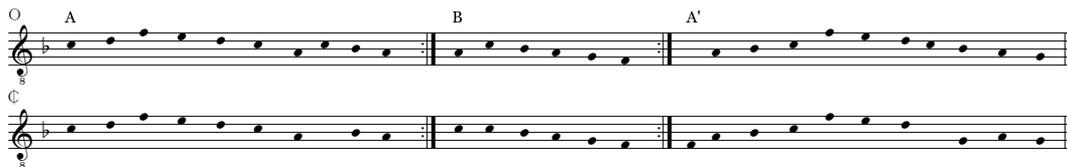
son, Ky - ri - e e -

Ky - ri - e -

Ky -

ley - son, Ky -

ley son,



Ex. 2, *Missa Sine nomine*, pitches of the tenor tune

improvised counterpoint. If you keep to the selection of steps offered by a hexachord and keep an eye on the tenor tune while selecting the steps to sing, it cannot go very wrong. This technique is characteristic of all the four-part music in *Sine nomine*, and it clearly contributes to the prominence of ostinato passages, which we here see the first glimpses of. Of course, *Missa Sine nomine* is not improvised music. It was painstakingly worked out in notation, but its composer consciously relied heavily on the style and sound of singing polyphony *super librum* in the liturgy.

After getting acquainted with the first pages of the mass, we know broadly the music of the whole cycle. But before going on with that, we have to take a short look on its tenor tune and whole layout.

It has not been possible to identify the tune, which the tenor voice presents twice in every part of the mass. If we remove the tenor's mensural attire, disregard a few decorative notes and most of the repeated notes we get a very simple structure (see *Ex. 2*). As already mentioned, *Missa Sine nomine* adheres to the mass model set up by the English *Missa Caput*. The Mixolydian antiphon melisma, which *Caput* builds on, is long and highly repetitive. The much shorter *Sine nomine* tune is repetitive as well: A A B B A', and could be a quote from a similar melisma lifted from some plainchant. Its melodic shape is, however, a bit peculiar: Most of the tune tends towards F, but it ends on G, which places the tenor in the G-Dorian realm, and much of the tune – four or five notes at the end of each segment – is taken up by descending patterns, which are convenient for cadencing in four-part polyphony. This makes it rather implausible that it had existed as part of a real song. It looks more like a construct made by its composer in emulation of the *Caput* tune; it was just very much easier to set in four parts. Where the *Caput* tune lacks descending lines and cadencing opportunities, this one is nearly nothing but such possibilities.

The *Caput* model requires that the tenor tune is sung twice in each setting, the so-called double *cursus*, first rhythmized in triple time (O) then in double time (C), while keeping the pitches unchanged. In *Sine nomine* this repeat is not absolutely strict. In the double time version the cadencing on A in first segment and on G in the last segment has been made more emphatic, and by repeating the last note in the B-segment at the start of the last segment he gets the full *f-f'* range to sound before ending on G. Why he choose this ending is impossible to know. Maybe he simply wanted to follow

Ex. 3. *Missa Sine nomine*, comparison of tenor parts

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus

Kyrie

Agnus dei

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is labeled 'Gloria' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 27 and contains several measures of music. The second staff is labeled 'Credo' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 34 and contains several measures of music. The third staff is labeled 'Sanctus' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 26 and contains several measures of music. The fourth staff is labeled 'Kyrie' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 27 and contains several measures of music. The fifth staff is labeled 'Agnus dei' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 22 and contains several measures of music. In the Kyrie staff, there are two red boxes. The first box, labeled 'a', highlights a phrase of music starting at measure 34. The second box, labeled 'b', highlights a phrase of music starting at measure 41.

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus

Kyrie

Agnus dei

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is labeled 'Gloria' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 58 and contains several measures of music. The second staff is labeled 'Credo' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 129 and contains several measures of music. The third staff is labeled 'Sanctus' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 72 and contains several measures of music. The fourth staff is labeled 'Kyrie' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 63 and contains several measures of music. The fifth staff is labeled 'Agnus dei' and contains a tenor line with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. It begins with a measure number of 61 and contains several measures of music.

his model by ending in G. A bright Mixolydian sound colours the final chords of most sections in the mass.

The mensural shape of the tenor is shown in *Ex. 3*. It is obvious that the Gloria tenor presents the original layout on which the other settings are based (the example only shows the differences that appear in the other settings; numbers indicate the many whole-bar rests). In Gloria, Credo and Sanctus the sound of the tenor is exactly the same. The differences in ligatures affect solely the distributions of the words. This is also true of most of the differences in Kyrie and Agnus dei, which do not change pitches – except for some conventional formulas at cadences – or the total duration of phrases. In Agnus dei I, bar 35, a *brevis*-bar rest is transformed into an upbeat *semibrevis a* preceded by rests (marked by an ‘a’ in the example). This was a decision made while composing the four-part structure and probably caused by the wish to hear the tenor imitate the superius two bars earlier. This, however, prolongs the sounding duration of the tenor to 45 bars instead of the 44 bars we hear in all other sections. The composer apparently liked the idea and made a similar insertion in the Kyrie (b. 40), which along with a prolongation of the notes *d’-e’* shifts the tenor by two *brevis*-bars in relation to the fixed plan. This delay is, however, soon recovered by shortening the two long *c’*-notes in the following phrases (marked by ‘b’). Apparently, the structure of regular durations in the tenor part was important to the composer.

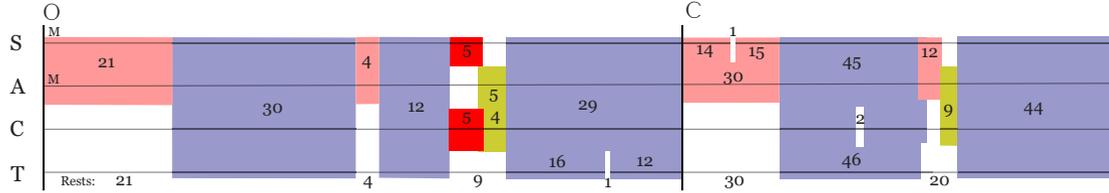
The double *cursus* layout stands out in the schematic representation of *Missa Caput* shown in *Fig. 1*.¹⁷ The patterns of the tenor tune (shown as the lowest line in the scheme) appear unchanged in every setting except for the shortened Agnus dei. It sings for 30+12+16+12 *brevis*-bars in the sections in triple time (O), and in double time sections (C) it is segmented into 46+44 bars (Agnus dei, 32+32). The tenor only comes in after introductory duos between the superius and the highest contratenor in every section. The tenor is normally set in four-part polyphony, which can be prolonged by changing the durations of the rests in the tenor tune and by insertion of duo passages of varying length, all in order to accommodate the number of words in the texts. In this way the Kyrie, which includes the long trope or prosula ‘Deus creator omnium’ has become of nearly the same length as Credo. The long stretches of four-part polyphony may be lightened by longer rests in the other voices, see Gloria and Credo. This thinning out is in Sanctus and Agnus dei in the triple time sections developed into duo (and trio) passages, in which the tenor participates, in order to set off ‘Pleni sunt’ and Agnus II as independent sections. The relationship between the settings consists not only in their building on the exactly same double *cursus* tenor and in varying the same pattern, each setting opens with a short two-part part *motto* (see *Ex. 4a*), slightly varied through the mass.

That this pattern became an established standard is demonstrated by the English *Missa Veterem hominem*, which is close being a clone of *Caput*. It appeared along with

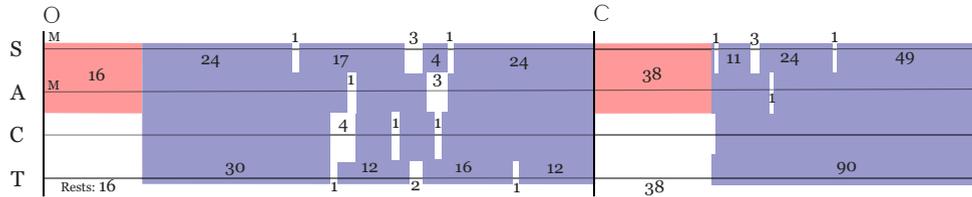
¹⁷ Based on the edition in Strohm, *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music*, 46–81.

Figure 1, schematic overview of *Missa Caput*

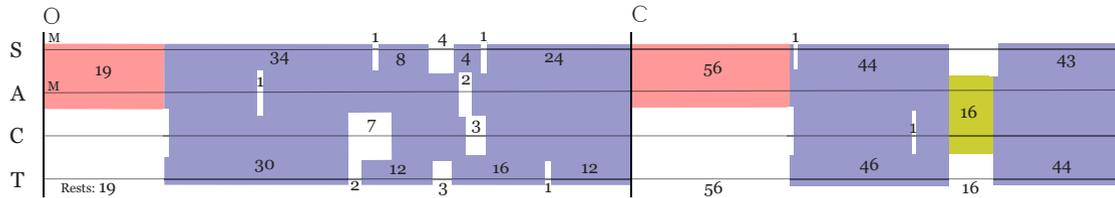
Kyrie



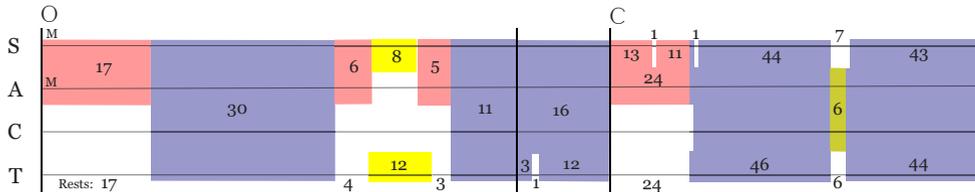
Gloria



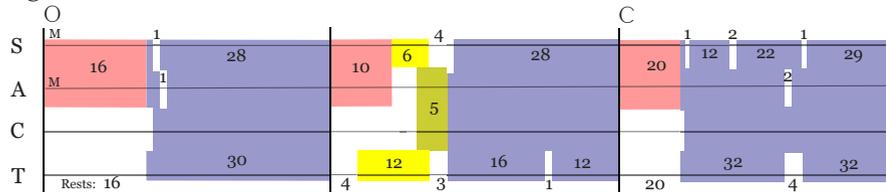
Credo



Sanctus



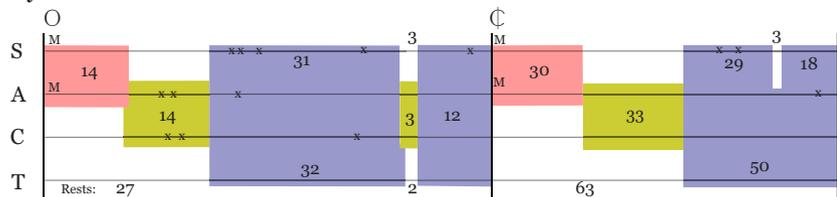
Agnus dei



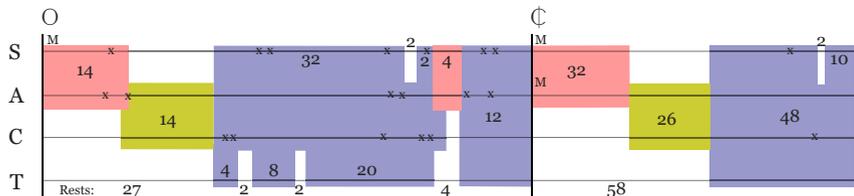
The horizontal lines stand for the voices. The tenor carrying the cantus firmus is placed as the lowest line. The coloured areas show the extents of their sounding with numbers indicating notated *brevis*-bars, the widths of these areas represent their temporal duration. Colour scheme:
 Blue = four or three voices singing;
 yellow = duo involving the tenor;
 light red = duo superius-high contratenor;
 red = duo superius-low contratenor;
 green = duo high-low contratenors;
 white = rests (showing rests of one whole *brevis*-bar or more only);
 M = *motto* in one or two voices.

Figure 2, schematic overview of *Missa Sine nomine*

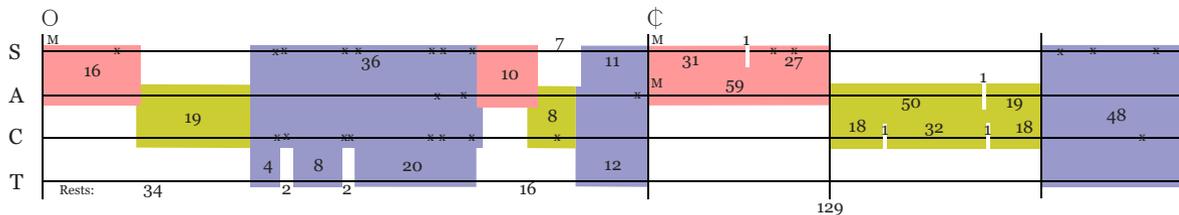
Kyrie



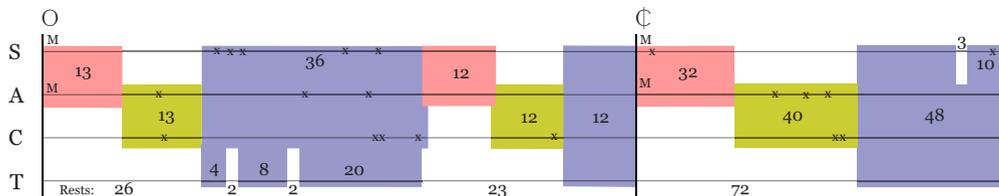
Gloria



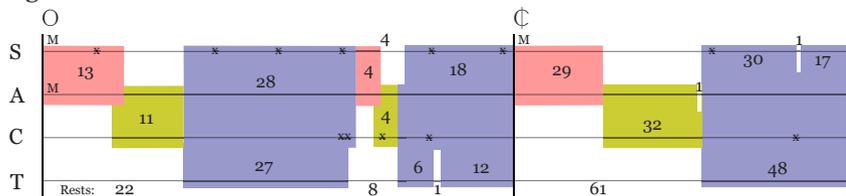
Credo



Sanctus



Agnus dei



Guillaume Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale* in the 1450s in the manuscript Trent 88. Du Fay changed the pattern to include a triple *cursus* in his Gloria and Credo, developing the motet tradition into a 'modern' concept.¹⁸

Compared to *Missa Caput*, the overview of *Missa Sine nomine* appears simple (Fig. 2). Every single section of the five settings of the mass ordinary texts consists, as we saw in Ex. 1, of first a duo between the superius and the high contratenor followed by another duo between the two contratenors; then the tenor comes clad in four-part harmony. In Credo an extra round of duos has been inserted into the triple time tenor presentation (O), probably to lengthen the section and give it musical weight, because the last fourth of this section sets quite a few words. We find the same procedure in the two last settings, but here the duos mark the start of 'Pleni sunt' in Sanctus and the second 'Agnus' in Agnus dei. In Credo the two duos in double time has grown to independent sections, 'Et incarnatus est' and 'Et resurrexit', both set off by double lines in the voice parts. Nowhere in the music does the tenor take part in anything like duos, as it does for short passages in other masses. A special trait is the appearances of the *motto* in every section of the mass, not only at the beginnings of the settings as normal, but also at the start of the sections repeating the tenor in double time (C). It looks as if the composer was familiar with the *Caput* double *cursus* pattern, simplified it radically for use in his first sections in triple time, and then just repeated the whole procedure in the double time sections in a near mechanical manner. In the overview the four-part passages look denser than in *Caput*, and this is also how the music sounds, counterbalanced, however, to some degree by the long, more airy duo passages.

Its *motto* or head-motif was clearly derived from the *Caput* tradition. Ex. 4 shows the *mottos* of four masses. They are all constantly varied through the masses but easy recognizable. The *Caput motto* (Ex. 4a) presents the basic idea, an inverted melodic curve reaching from the opening *c''* to *d'* and up again involving some rising fourths. This idea is further developed in *Missa Veterem hominem* (Ex. 4b), which moved the leap of a fourth forward and imitated the melodic line in the contratenor. Presumably Du Fay knew this opening and took it over in a more elegant, less fuzzy shape (Ex. 4c). The *motto* of *Missa Sine nomine* is of the same mould (Ex. 4d). One could say that the descending line of the superius simply passes through the 'safe' concords for an improvised voice against a long-held note: octave, sixth, fifth etc., until the held note changes. However, its inversed curve is so similar to the others' that the *motto* most probably was inspired by this tradition. Moreover, the composer discovered that the *caput motto* could be combined with a short quotation of his tenor tune in the contratenor: *c'-d'-f'-e'-d'*. This combination of the superius figure and the tenor tune appears more or less prominent at the start of the Kyrie (see Ex. 1), in 'Et incarnatus est' in Credo, in both sections of Sanctus, and at the start of Agnus dei. The use of a *motto* to underscore the

18 Schematic overviews of these masses can be found in my introduction to the online edition; concerning *Missa Se la ace ay pale*, see further my online edition at http://sacred.pwch.dk/Ma_Dufo2.pdf.

Ex. 5a, *Missa Sine nomine*, end of first section in Sanctus

Ex. 5b, *Missa Caput*, end of Gloria

Ex. 5c, *Missa Sine nomine*, Kyrie, bars 145-147

of the ‘English figure’ may appear in quite dissonant textures. In Kyrie, bars 145–146 (Ex. 5c), two sets of cadential movements are played out simultaneously, one to A (in altus and tenor with the ‘English figure’) and one to C (superius and the low contra). This is what happens in improvisatory music!

Like *Caput* and its companion *Veterem hominem*, the mass excels in non-standard embellishments of cadential points, with or without suspensions. A typical one can be

Ex. 6a, *Missa Sine nomine*, end of Gloria

Ex. 6b, *Missa Caput*, end of first section in Kyrie

found at the end of Gloria (see *Ex. 6a*). A very close relation to it ends the first section in the Kyrie of *Caput* (*Ex. 6b*). These examples demonstrate that *Missa Sine nomine* was composed by someone with an intimate knowledge of the *Caput* mass more than they are signs of an English origin. They stand out as quotations. Like much else in the mass they appear to fit in with the composer's preconceived plan.

An experiment in unity in sound – the sound of improvised polyphony

The most remarkable trait of *Missa Sine nomine* is its curious, absolutely rigid construction scheme. As mentioned above, it seems as if the composer did analyse the *Caput* model, and reduced its essential characteristics into a minimum setup. He distilled it so to say into a basic formula. In every setting of the mass items this formula is first presented in triple time (O) and then repeated in double time (C), the only variable being the lengths of the sections, which may be expanded or slightly reduced. The last 12 *brevis*-bars of every first section and the last 48 bars of the second are close to being fixed elements (cf. *Fig. 2*). In this way *Missa Sine nomine* comes out as a musical entity, which ten times runs through the same overall course of events, where only some of the notes, those not sung by the tenor, may be varied.

Singing in two voices occupies a great part of the duration of its settings, between 43 and 55 per cent, almost double the time the duos fill out in *Missa Caput*, where their percentages lie between 24 and 34 per cent. A great number of contemporary masses can be found with long introductory duets, but these duets nearly always involve the two highest voices only, or are quite variable in their choice of voice-pairs. *Sine nomine* seems to be unique in its adherence to this rigid scheme. The duos are as we saw in *Ex. 1* very easy on the ears. After the motto, the voices continue in free polyphony, which often turn to imitative passages, but always at the unison or the octave. In general, there are much more imitation in the duos than in the four-part music, and we find even passages in canon as in *Sanctus* bars 66–68, a unison strict canon resulting in parallel thirds.

The first impression of hearing the mass is that much of it is pure sound, the sound of singing voices. This impression stems from the Kyrie, the *Sanctus*, the *Agnus dei* and passages in the *Credo*, where only a few words or syllables carry long stretches of music. The composer, however, has been careful to place the text so it can be heard without difficulties. The words for the three 'Kyrie'-invocations are, for example, precisely notated in the tenor voice, which is quite unusual. In the settings of long wordy texts as *Gloria* and *Credo*, a syllabic declamation of the words is quite common. Especially the duos take care to let the words be clearly heard, and they can be quite expressive – see for example the syllabic setting of 'Cruxifixus etiam pro nobis' in bars 131–137 in the second section of the *Credo* (*Ex. 7*). In the music for four voices we find another sort of text setting, which rather may be characterized as a polyphony of words: The words can be heard distinctly in the top voice, stretched out in long melismas or recited in

131

Cru - ci - fi - xus e - ti - am pro no - bis: sub Pon - ci - o Pi - la - to

Cru - ci - fi - xus e - ti - am pro no - bis: sub Pon - ci - o Pi - la -

Ex. 7 *Missa Sine nomine*, Credo, bars 131–40

fast notes, all on top of lower voices trailing behind or participating with the superius in the delivery of words.

In *Ex. 7* we hear again the motif I named ‘x’ combined with triadic figures in imitation on ‘etiam pro nobis’. I have singled out and marked this figure with an ‘x’ in the schematic overview of *Sine nomine* (see *Figure 2*) in places where it is foregrounded in varying shapes, also in inversion. A single glance at the scheme shows that this figure appears so often that it becomes a strong element in the sounding identity of the mass. This figure belongs to the stock of trade of improvised polyphony, of singing a counter voice against a held tenor note. The concords of fifths, sixths and thirds are safe to use, and moving between them in the shape 5–6–5–3 only and variants hereof are even safer (*Ex. 8a*), and they can be combined into interlocking imitative patterns (*Ex. 8b*), which produce an ostinato effect. In Credo and Sanctus the composer seems to be ‘in love’ with his x-motif, which generates a lot of imitating ostinatos. Agnus dei is similar, but here he succeeds in letting the melodic lines flow more freely, less busy and obsessive with hexachordal figures. Especially the end of Agnus dei is successful.

Ex. 8a, basic figures of counterpoint

8b, combined into an imitative pattern

The last appearance of this figure in the first section of Gloria is in the form of a linear ascent *a'–d''* and then back to *a'* repeated three times (*Ex. 9*, bars 72–76). It creates an ostinato effect similar to the three-part imitations on the x-figure. The ostinato is a characteristic technique of improvising multiple voices against an unmoving tenor. Here the composer performs the ostinato against a moving tenor. It is a very effective way of building up tension towards the final cadence. The first sections of Kyrie, Credo and Sanctus make similar use of ostinato passages leading to their final cadences, and ostinato effects are heard in several other places, in the duos as well.

Ex. 9, *Missa Sine nomine*, Gloria, bars 72–79

In the duos that introduce the second section of Gloria another basic motif appears, which also belongs to the improvisatory bag of tricks. In bars 112–119 the two contratenors moves down and up the F-triad in unison close imitation on the words ‘Qui tollis peccata mundi’ (Ex. 10). The triadic motif, which we could call ‘y’, appears often in the mass in different guises (Kyrie, bb. 58 and 119, Credo, bb. 3, 19, 110, 141, 162 and 207, Agnus dei, bb. 17, 89 and 117). Along with the x-figure this imitative motif reaffirms the musical sameness of all the mass sections.

Ex. 10, triadic imitation figure in altus and contra (Gloria bars 112–24)

To conclude on the sound of *Missa Sine nomine*, we must say that it contains nothing spectacular, only smooth unchallenging counterpoint in an unchanging pattern of duos leading to four-part carpets of sound decorated with swarms of standard figures, a sound of many concords of thirds and full triads with the occasional improvisatory sharp dissonance. If anything, we experience the same sound picture again and again. It is not that exactly the same music is repeated; in fact, it is quite admirable how the composer has avoided repeating passages note for note, even if some of the imitative passages on the x-figure are close. However, all the diversity put into his use of expressive, declamatory passages, imitations and his play with imitative figures only serves to maintain an extremely consistent sound picture.

On the whole, *Missa Sine nomine* observes the rules of artful polyphony, which was codified in the famous *Liber de arte contrapuncti* from 1477 by Johannes Tinctoris. This book appeals to improvising singers as well as to musicians creating polyphony

on paper.²¹ It describes the process of creating music as the same one in both cases, but with differing expectations of how strictly all rules can be kept. The composer is responsible that all voice parts relate correctly to each other, while the singers in *cantus super librum* (improvising on the book) often are able to relate only to the tune of the tenor, which they can see in the page of ‘the book’, a liturgical chant collection. There cannot, however, be any doubt that for Tinctoris the ideal was the artful music, and in his last rule he underscores that the request for *varietas*, variety, during the sounding of music to the same degree applies to improvised music as to composed music. In his eight rule Tinctoris defined *varietas*:

Also, any composer or improviser . . . of the greatest genius may achieve this diversity if he either composes or improvises now by one quantity, then by another, now by one perfection, then by another, now by one proportion, then by another, now by one melodic interval, then by another, now with suspensions, then without suspensions, now with fuga, then without fuga, now with pauses, then without pauses, now diminished, now plain ...²²

This means composing with variation in tempo and rhythmic activity and in melody, with changes between simple declamation and textural complexity, with and without fuga etc. – everything but repetitions. It is not a very clear definition of the desirable *varietas*. It could include Tinctoris’ own *Missa L’homme armé*, of which Edgar Sparks remarked that ‘Tinctoris, without doubt, is following his own recommendation that a composer make use of all artifices in a large composition such as a Mass, but the effect, on the whole, is rather jumbled.’²³ If we disregard some repetitive elements, *Missa Sine nomine* could also fit his definition of *varietas*, even if it is near being the opposite of Tinctoris’ own *cantus firmus* mass. However, we must keep in mind that Tinctoris formulated his rules and opinions on the background of his knowledge of the music of the preceding generations, to which *Missa Sine nomine* belongs. It is highly probable that in the middle of the century, long before, for example, pervading imitation became a standard structural device in sacred polyphony, there was no consensus on the balance between unity and diversity.

In a sister manuscript to Rome CS 14, the contemporary MS Cappella Sistina 51, we find an anonymous mass building on Ockeghem’s chanson ‘D’ung aultre amer’ (fols. 113^v–122), which Rob C. Wegman characterized as ‘an experiment’. Here the experiment went strongly in the direction of diversity. The anonymous composer used ‘the

21 Allan Seay (ed.), *Johannis Tinctoris Opera theoretica* (Corpus scriptorum de musica 22; American Institute of Musicology, 1978), vol. 2.

22 Tinctoris, *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, Liber III, Cap. VII. Translation quoted after Alexis Luko, ‘Tinctoris on *varietas*’, *Early Music History*, 27 (2008), 99–136 (at 129).

23 Edgar H. Sparks, *Cantus Firmus in Mass and Motet, 1420–1520* (Berkeley, 1963), 241. The mass is published in J. Tinctoris (W. Melin. ed.), *Opera omnia* (Corpus mensurabilis musicae 18; American Institute of Musicology, 1976), 74.

whole range of contemporary cantus firmus treatment—from strictest to freest—’ within a double *cursus* framework in order to create the greatest possible variety. This resulted in reaching ‘a point where the tenor had ceased to be effective as a structural voice. ... The composer’s solution, the chain structure, was a masterstroke, it not only enabled him to present a wide range of styles in succession, but also offered the possibility of creating a new type of musical coherence, replacing the coherence provided by the cantus firmus.’²⁴ This mass may be a decade younger than *Missa Sine nomine*, and it too relies heavily on two-voice passages. In Gloria and Credo especially, we find duos just as extended as in *Sine nomine* – and in similar patterns – but also quick exchanges between changing pairs of voices. The voices move through their ranges in a way quite different from the hexachord fixation in *Sine nomine*; the long stretches of four-part polyphony are characterized by the greatest possible variety and care for word expression. As Wegman remarked, *Missa D’ung aultre amer* is far more listener-oriented than the pure cantus firmus mass.

Alexis Luko offers a different interpretation of Tinctoris’ concept of *varietas*. It must first and foremost be understood as advice on the organizing of music as well-formed and impressive speech in accordance with the classic rules of rhetoric. In her analysis of Tinctoris’ freely composed four-part *Missa Sine nomine III*, she finds that he was in favour of using motif repetitions (*redictae*) and musical modules as expressive means at rhetorical important moments. ‘What is new ... is Tinctoris’s propensity for employing units of *redictae* at rhetorically significant musical junctures. Ideas presented in his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* and his *Missa sine nomine no. 3* suggests that his attempts at forging links between music and rhetoric were not only theoretically based, but also textually motivated.’²⁵ Decades earlier, *Missa Sine nomine* may in all its repetitiveness have represented a different musical experiment concentrating on the unity of the mass music.

The sound of the Sanctus

Musical unity is a constituent trait of the four-part cantus firmus mass as it emerged during the decades around 1450. The use of a liturgical or a secular tune as a recurrent element could link the single mass cycle to a specific liturgical feast, to a civil occasion,

24 Rob C. Wegman, ‘The Anonymous Mass *D’ung aultre amer*: A Late Fifteenth-Century Experiment’, *Musical Quarterly*, 74 (1990), 566–94 (at 588). The mass was published in Rex Eakins (ed.), *An Editorial Transnotation of the Manuscript Cappella Sistina 51*, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, Liber Missarum* (The Institute of Mediaeval Music, Ottawa, Canada, vol. 3, 2001), 235–315; an online edition is available as Agostino Magro (ed.), *Missa D’ung aultre amer (4 vv)*, (Le Corpus des Messes Anonymes du XVe siècle; Programme Ricercar, 2016) at <http://ricercar-old.cesr.univ-tours.fr/3-programmes/EMN/MessesAnonymes/sources/75.pdf>.

25 Alexis Fleur Luko, *Unification and Varietas in the Sine nomine Mass from Dufay to Tinctoris* (PhD-diss., McGill University; Montreal, 2007), 371. The mass is published in Tinctoris, *Opera*, 55.

to a donor's preferences, or it could enrich the mass music as participant in a rich network of symbolic associations. And combined with the recurrent motto, it assured a degree of unity between the five elements of the ordinary. Moreover, the majority of composers sought to keep the music within carefully circumscribed stylistic boundaries, not least in order to maintain a recognizable personal style in the developing fierce competition among musicians. The *Caput* model carried on from the older motet a heritage of varying a set of melodic ideas within a strict framework. This comes into a full flowering of expertly varied elegance in Du Fay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*, and it may have inspired the composer of *Missa Sine nomine*. However, after a short time the fast development of the complexity of contrapuntal skills, of displays of musical artifice, tended to make the musical surface of many masses difficult to perceive for the lay listener; the unity of the liturgy became veiled by a maze of sound, which was enjoyable to the expert listener, and which intrigued the reader of musical notation.

In his book *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass* Andrew Kirkman concludes that for the believers participating in the High Mass the sacred moment of transubstantiation and Elevation of the Host, which was performed by the celebrant in secrecy during the singing of Sanctus, could be stretched out through the whole Mass. 'It is not hard to see how the spread of imagery ... of the redeemer throughout the Mass could have encouraged a similar consistency in physical phenomena devised to enhance and adorn its message, including the music. This, I propose, is the ultimate force behind the creation of the cyclic cantus firmus Mass and its celebrated musical unity.'²⁶ This may also be the reason for the creation of *Missa Sine nomine*. It is difficult to think of any candidate better equipped to demonstrate the unity of the mass music in a way so easily perceivable to any believer, even when the listener was placed in a humble position outside the choir, far away from the altar. The musical world of the sacred actions performed during the Sanctus sounds already from the first notes of the Kyrie, and it never stops or changes.²⁷ It celebrates the Eucharist in a musical language of relative anonymity that was cultivated in improvised polyphony, in the practice of *Singing upon the book*, which adorned a great number of liturgical services.

Missa Sine nomine may be regarded as an experiment in musical unity comprehensible to everybody. Obviously, it was a conscious compositional decision to reduce the *double cursus* layout from the *Caput* model to essentials in a rigorously maintained structure of duos and four-part polyphony, to introduce every first and second section of the setting with a *motto*, and to pervade the music with easily recognizable contrapuntal commonplaces. We have as little knowledge of the identity of the tenor tune as

26 Andrew Kirkman, *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass. Medieval Context to Modern Revival* (Cambridge 2010), 203.

27 A digital performance of Kyrie and Sanctus can be heard at <http://sacred.pwch.dk/>; a different interpretation of the complete mass is available on Rob C. Wegman's site *Renaissance Masses, 1440–1520* (at <http://www.robcwegman.org/mass.htm>).

the fifteenth-century scribes. If it was a tune constructed by the composer for use in this mass composition, it fits perfectly into the way he planned all its other elements. The composer has shown the utmost care to assure that coherence and structure are immediately accessible to listeners as well as to the officiating clergy. The total effect may be bordering on the naive, but there is nothing naive about his boldness in using improvisatory practices to create a pervasive, sacred sound. It offers the participants in the Mass a feeling of security and predictability – in its core not very different from much popular modern music for relaxation.

The existence of two such ‘experimental’ masses, however different they are, in the repertory of the representative collections, which ended up in the Cappella Sistina in the early 1480s, shows that the development of the cyclic cantus firmus mass during its first decades was anything but linear. Alongside the masses developing complex cantus firmus treatment, canonic sophistication and use of multiple tunes as in the works by Du Fay, Domarto, d’Amerval and Regis and the series of five *L’homme armé* masses in Rome CS 14, a keen interest in the direct appeal of sacred music persisted, even if musicology largely disregarded such music when telling the history of the cyclic mass. The legacy of the *Caput* model had many facets. *Missa Sine nomine* is evidence of the model’s success and potential of opening up for different directions, and as such it fits perfectly among the masses of Rome CS 14. Like *Missa D’ung aultre amer* the mass was received favourably in international musical life from Flanders to Italy during the second half of the fifteenth century and is preserved in the same sources as the works by famous musicians.

Abstract

In the middle of the fifteenth century a principal concern of the new sacred genre, the cyclic cantus firmus mass, was the question of musical and liturgical unity. How to balance the quest for unity and the wish for diversity in musical expression or *varietas*, which Tinctoris advised in his teachings of counterpoint. I take a closer look at an anonymous mass dating from the decade just after 1450, the *Missa Sine nomine* in MS Cappella Sistina 14, in which the composer was intensely involved with the problem of unity, so involved that he – according to our ideas about music – has focused on ‘unity’ to such a degree that it became rather to the detriment of ‘diversity’. The mass was highly regarded in its time, and this fact puts our aesthetic understanding of the period’s music to test. In addition to the classical analysis of how such a cantus firmus mass is structured as a musical architecture transmitted in writing, we have to ponder how it served as a sounding reality, and how it may have related to the little we know about the musical practices of the period.

The author:

Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, associate professor emeritus, dr.phil., Section of Musicology, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, Karen Blixens Vej 1, DK-2300 Copenhagen S, Denmark · pw@pwch.dk · www.pwch.dk