

TWO MENSURATION CANONS

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In the preface to the first selection from the Trent Codices (*DTÖ*, v. 14–15 [Jg. VII], p. XXVIII) Adler and Koller make reference to a piece with French words which is supplied with a Latin description or “canon”, as it was called at the time. Only a single voice, with the text “*Eslongies suy*” (Trent 23) is recorded from which the other voice must be derived according to the following “explanation”: “Qui cupit accipiat cantus cantare tenorem istius minimas cantet simul et semibreves sub dyapason, sed in dyatessaron sint tibi breves”. The editors of the *Denkmäler* interpret this to mean that the minims and semibreves, taken out of the written part and transposed to the lower octave, form the lower voice while the breves, transposed to the fourth, form the upper voice. Adler and Koller do not publish the music but assert that the solution results in “eine keineswegs erquickliche Musik”. This, indeed, is an understatement because their solution makes no musical sense whatsoever. They have become here the victims of the ambiguity, sometimes deliberately sought by the composer, of the explanatory description.

Closer examination reveals that the terms “dyapason” and “dyatessaron” stand here not for musical intervals but for ratios of augmentation and diminution, as they frequently do in similar cases. The *cantus* part must be transcribed as it stands in the Trent Codices and the tenor observes the same melody with certain modifications. In this particular case all minims and semibreves must be doubled (ratio 2 : 1 = diapason) so that all quarter notes of the transcription become half notes and all eighth notes quarter notes. Were this procedure applied also to the breves, all half notes of the original would become whole notes. However, the canon stipulates that the breves should be “in dyatessaron” which means that what would ordinarily become the whole note should be reduced by four to a quarter note. We have here a strict mensuration canon in which the tenor starts simultaneously with the upper voice

at the lower octave but with all notes doubled in value, except for the half notes which are halved. The transcription below (Ex. 1) shows that the resulting setting is in keeping with the laws of 15th-century music. Aside from a few unorthodox suspensions it is a skilful composition, if allowance is made for its inherent complication. The smooth cadences especially prove the correctness of the solution. It should also be noted that the words of the canon bear on the music as they frequently do in this type of composition, e. g., Machaut's *Ma fin est mon commencement*. In our case the idea of remoteness from the beloved (*Eslongies suy*) is musically expressed in that the tenor, although singing the same melody as the upper voice, is forced to keep its distance because of the augmentation.

This mensuration canon came to my mind when I went through the canon *Le ray au soleil* published by Prof. Ghisi under the name of Ciconia as a supplement to his study on *Italian Ars-Nova Music* (Vol. I, 173 of this periodical). A cursory examination of the piece makes it clear that the version as it is transcribed cannot possibly represent the intention of the composer because of the dissonant cadences, especially the final one, and the lack of a rational relationship between the voices. The author explains the anomalies as bold appoggiature and harsh effects of a "modern and significant example of contrapuntal technique", but the bold progressions that we do find in the music of the period look quite differently. In fact, the transcription at which Prof. Ghisi, to use his own words, "fortunately succeeded to arrive" is inconsistent with the style of the period, with the Latin prescription, and even with his own, comments (p. 188). According to his explanation the canon starts after the fourth eighth note while it begins in his transcription after the third. Moreover, he augments notes of the same value (the two white semibreves) once six times and once four and half times without any justification for treating them differently. Likewise there is no indication that rests are intended at the beginning.

Through the kindness of Dr. Carapetyan I was able to examine a photograph of the original. First of all it should be noted that the piece is anonymous. The fact that the upper part of the folio contains a composition by Ciconia does not entitle us to ascribe the canon to him also. We have here again an example of men-

Trent 23

Anonymous

Example 1

Anonymous

Example 1

Anonymous

Es-lon-gies suy de vous, bel-le ma [i]-

stres - se; es-lon-gies suy de vo[us] cuer

no-bleet gent; es-lon-gies suy de vo[us] flour

ex-cel- - lent; es-lon-gies,

suy de joye et de li-es - - -

- - - - - se.

Qui cupit accipiat cantus cantare tenorem istius minimas cantet simul et semibreves sub dyapason, sed in dyatessaron sint tibi breves.

suration canon in which the parts begin simultaneously. The "explanatory" words in Latin are very obscure. In such cases it is best to begin with a musical analysis of the given part. It is unmistakable that in spite of the rhythm of major prolation the melody falls into groups of four eighth notes which form harmonic units. Taking the cue from the implied harmony I have augmented each note of the tenor by four so that a highly intricate rhythmic pattern results. The Latin canon, too, suggests a relation of 3 : 4, and it will be noticed that four prolations of the upper voice correspond to three notes in the lower. The augmentation applies uniformly to all notes. The sentence "sed facit alba moras" means that the white notes should become rests in the tenor. The transcription I propose here eliminates the dissonant cadences and has the advantage, aside from the consistent handling of the canon, of fewer discordances on the strong beat.

The rest in measure 16 is a minim in the original. Prof. Ghisi has transcribed it as a semibreve and I have retained his emendation. The second *f* in measure 15 has been changed by erasure from a minim to a semibreve, but the original value seems correct. Otherwise my transcription of the upper voice agrees with that of Prof. Ghisi except for measures 17 and 18 in which I have corrected wrong alterations of the minims. Measures 12-13 still contain some awkward clashes. In view of the rests it seems likely that a third part is missing. The remark "tertius unum" may possibly hint at a third canonic voice, but if it does I do not know how it should come in. On the whole the canon is not as convincing as the first one.

I take this opportunity to correct a few errors in Prof. Ghisi's transcriptions. On p. 16 of the musical supplement measure 31 of the upper voice should begin with two quarter-note rests (not three), as the facsimile indicates, and the following notes must be moved so that the red notes of measure 32 exactly coincide in both voices. The continuation contains a further inaccuracy in measure 35, but this is a negligible point because the part is fragmentary anyway. A more **serious error** must be corrected on **p. 7**, measures **39-41** and **44-47**. Here the transcriber made a wrong emendation in the contratenor, overlooked a breve in the tenor, and furthermore confused the sign *i.* (*senaria imperfecta*) with a rest. Through this mistake the nice imitation between tenor and contratenor, indicated

Perugia fragment, fol. 72.

• Anonymous

Example 2

Le ray su so - ley qui dret som kar mey - ne
 En soy bra - cant la dou - ce Tor - to - rel - le
 La quel compaing non
 on - ques re - no - u - vel - le. A bon droyt sem - bla que en toy per - fect re - gne.

Dum tria percurris quatuor valet
 Tertius unum, subque diapason
 Sed facit alba moras

Madrigal: Una panthera

Ciconia

Example 3

Example 6

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[ador-] - - - - - no,
TENOR

[ador-] - - - - - no,
- no,

Con - stan - tee è l'ar - me

Con - stan - tee è l'ar - me chi la guar - dain - tor -

Con - stan - tee è l'ar - me chi la guar - dain - tor -

chi la guar-dain-tor - - - - - [no]

- - - - - [no]

- - - - - [no]

by a bracket below, has been spoiled. The whole passage must read, as a similar section in measure 29-31 confirms, like Ex. 3.

I have drawn attention to these mistakes because Prof. Ghisi's article is too valuable to be left with these blemishes. There are some inaccuracies and obscurities in the text which may be due in part to the fact that the author was not entirely familiar with the English language. For example, the remark about "some passages in canon form with alternating rests" (p. 187) concerns a single voice, moreover a composition that is not a canon; it is probably supposed to refer to snatches of imitation (?). It may be pointed out that the term *isoritmia* (p. 190) is used by the author not in its commonly accepted sense of isorhythm, but to denote chordal style (similar rhythm in all voices) which would better be called differently.

In conclusion the reader may like to be informed that Prof. Ghisi's article in *La Rinascita* (1942) to which he frequently refers and of which his present study is only an extension has appeared also in a parallel German version in *Archiv für Musikforschung* VII (1942), 17. For reasons unknown to me this article is passed over in silence although it has the advantage of being much more readily accessible than the Italian one.

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