dissertations

Finn Mathiassen—*The Style of the Early Motet (An Investigation of the Old Corpus of the Montpellier Manuscript)*

Copenhagen: Dan Fog Musikforlag, 1966 (212 pp.; transl. by Johanne M. Stochholm)

Theodore Karp

The publication of a dissertation presenting a broad study of the early 13th-century motet is bound to be greeted with interest by medievalists. As a group, we are still working to establish better control over a wide number of repertoires and to expose these to scrutiny by means of published editions. Professor Mathiassen repays our interest with a wealth of statistical information and more than 350 musical examples, which together illustrate his commentary on those aspects of the subject that he deems to be most noteworthy. The study, based on the motets of fascicles II–VI of the Montpellier MS H 196, is organized into four main sections. The first outlines the reasons for the choice of topic, in the process surveying many earlier views regarding medieval polyphony. A consideration of cultural and aesthetic factors underlying the 13th-century motet concludes this section. The following chapter is devoted to a consideration of the individual upper voice: the relationship between text and music, rhythm, tonality, and form. The third chapter treats techniques of part writing and "polyphonic phrasing," while the final section takes up questions of harmonic practice. Extremely little attention is paid to the motet tenors since the author feels that these offer little to explain the immediate appeal of the early motet and since excellent coverage of the subject is already available in the commentary volume of the Rokseth edition. Nevertheless, the format of that volume did not permit an exhaustive inquiry into tenor treatment. Many worthwhile questions remain to be answered, and it is a pity that so few of these are investigated in the present volume.

The ultimate value which this monograph may hold for the individual reader depends in large part upon the extent to which the reader is able to accept the author's orientation towards his subject, together with certain premises on which the work is based. Those seeking little more than an orderly listing of certain stylistic traits observable in the Old Corpus of the Montpellier MS will find greater satisfaction than those looking for penetrating interpretation.

The central question that seems to underlie the present study is whether it is possible to discuss the motets of the period 1190–1260 in terms of a single style. In one sense we may speak of *the* style of the early motet just as we may speak of *the* style of the symphony, let us say during the 70-year period, 1820–90. But if we speak in these terms, it would seem that we imply an interest in defining those common characteristics that mark the essential bonds of unity among works that may also possess contrasting features. We even suggest an interest in the comparison of these common traits with their counterparts in earlier and later repertoires. Yet in this study, the author does not display any particular interest in charting the main channel of a diversified repertory. We are given examples of the different ways in which phrases may be articulated and of the different fashions in which phrases in one voice-part may relate proportionally to those in other voice-parts. But the relative importance of the various techniques is never indicated, nor are the musical aims and justifications explored. In another sense, experience with all later music teaches that significant stylistic change may be observed within any major genre during a period of more than a half-century. If we are concerned with detail technique, we cannot merely assume the presence of a unified style. But while the statistics presented in this study give evidence of stylistic diversity, there is practically no interpretation of the meaning of this diversity. Questions of stylistic evolution, geographical provenance, etc., are left almost untouched. Furthermore, the manner in which the statistics are presented will not enable the reader to draw his own conclusions regarding these basic questions. The author's attitudes towards scholarship's accomplishments and responsibilities with regard to questions of stylistic evolution are stated in puzzling fashion. Apparently referring to all polyphony created between 1170 and 1250, he first declares (p. 12) that "the chronology of the music has been fairly well clarified." But three pages later he finds premature earlier efforts "to ascertain—or at worst to postulate—diverse historical and sometimes also national relationships of which positive proof is lacking." Since the author refers also (p. 12) to the danger of "losing our way in a morass of dreams and barren speculations," it would appear that one of the attitudes underlying the present work is a quest for security and certainty. However, should we reach a state in which specialists in a given field prefer not to deal with central problems when solutions for these are problematical, to whom shall the average reader turn for guidance?

Since the author's purpose is to explore "the style of the motet" of the first half of the 13th century, one must next question whether the Montpellier repertoire provides a fit vehicle for this purpose. Although Professor Mathiassen does not go into this problem in any detail—there is only a remark that *Mo* lacks examples of the three-voice motet with a single text for the upper voices—he apparently assumes a much higher degree of representativity than seems justifiable without further documentation on his part. Consider just one small item. In a penetrating study of the motets preserved in the Notre Dame MSS, Hans Tischler found that among motets

employing different modal patterns for different tenor statements, changes from faster to slower rhythms are about as numerous as changes in the opposite direction. In the Montpellier repertoire, however, the balance is clearly weighted in favor of changes to quicker rhythms and the incidence of occurrence is smaller. Either a freak of chance entered into the later selection process, or, what seems more likely, there was a change in taste.

Related to this issue is a misleading statement (p. 28) that "relatively few of the motets in *Ms* are unique, most of them can also be found in other collections." According to Rokseth, half of the motets contained in the fifth and sixth fascicles are unica in the sense that they are not preserved elsewhere in polyphonic form; indeed there is a noticeably increased concentration of unica towards the later portion of each fascicle. Together the two fascicles account for more than three-quarters of the repertory being considered. At no point does the author indicate the extent to which these unica are stylistically similar or different from remaining motets preserved in other polyphonic sources, even though his use of unica as examples often seems to raise the question.

Despite the author's seeming desire to avoid the uncertain and unprovable, there is much in the study that is controversial. Professor Mathiassen correctly points out that a 13th-century motet, once composed, was not unchangeable; but in so doing, he reaches an unwise balance.

> By virtue of its recreative function, the motet is more closely related to, for instance, chess or cricket than to the art of music when considered from a modern point of view. . . . A thirteenth-century motet is not a work of art in the modern absolute sense of the word, but a fluid esthetic phenomenon, a series of more or less diverging, but fully equivalent versions of a model, which, in so far as it can be distinguished as such at all, in itself cannot be considered more than one of the versions (p. 37).

There is also an extreme emphasis on the importance of linear forces in the 13th-century motet and on the independence and self-sufficiency of the individual upper voice-part. We are told (p. 77) that "a medieval motet should not be read vertically like a modern score," and that (p. 63) "the effect of the pitch of any note in a given context depends primarily on which of the . . . two tertian series it belongs to—but not on its vertical relations and only in special cases on its relation to a single tonic." Further, it is claimed (p. 91) that "the composers were given a completely free hand with regard to the form of the motet upper voice." This nearly total disregard for the formative role of consonance and dissonance and for the structural influence of the tenor on the upper voices is at odds both with occasional admissions of the author and with his statistics which demonstrate how keenly aware the composers were of harmonic forces. The influence of the author's orientation is apparent on many levels. It is suggested (p. 58) that there are "cases in which written chromatic alterations tend to avoid a

leading note." The two examples furnished show a b♭ proceeding to an a and then to a c'. If we analyze only the individual voice-part (all that is given by the author), it is quite possible to arrive at the conclusion that the essential cadential movement in each instance consists of the progression b♭–c', and that the a is merely an escape tone. But if we take the polyphonic complex into consideration, we find that the b♭'s are dissonances that resolve to a and that the essential cadential movement is a–c', a fifth opening to an octave, the lower voice moving down a whole step. The relevance of such a cadence to a discussion of the leading tone is doubtful whether the cadence is adorned by a non-essential tone or not.

The author also investigates whether a sixth between upper voices was treated as consonant or not. Although he mentions testimony by Anonymous IV and Odington to the contrary, Professor Mathiassen concludes that such sixths were regarded as dissonances since the lower note of the interval "resolves" downward (normally by leap rather than by step, as is claimed). Most of the examples mentioned, however, are derived from motets that exist also in versions for one voice less. If the examples are to be employed as evidence for the above conclusion, it is necessary to show first that the versions for the greater number of voices came into being first and then to establish that the upper voices were composed simultaneously rather than in seriate fashion, as indicated by the theorists. Otherwise, we perceive that the so-called resolutions were in existence before the sixths came into being and that these motions therefore originated independently of the sixths.

One further troublesome area remains to be considered: certain choices of terminology will make many uncomfortable. While it is useful to distinguish between melismatic sections of two-part organa that are in irregular notation and others that display strict modal patterns, it is questionable whether the best way to do this is to restrict the meaning of *organum purum* to the former and to create a new Latin term, *organum mensuratum*, for the latter. This reviewer is uneasy about such terms as single beat (employed in connection with the *modi recti*) and double beat (for the *modi per ultra mensuram*), and simultaneous imitation (designating parallel motion). The propriety of the terms fugato, canon, and double counterpoint in their particular contexts seems dubious. The use of a terminology for phrase structure that is primarily dependent upon criteria of poetic structure and the presence or absence of rests creates several problems. Is it meaningful to speak of a "whole phrase" when such a term may encompass structures as diverse as a two-note motive and an entire voice part? Further difficulties arise from the practice of employing the adjective "structural" in a musical context but with the meaning corresponding to a division point in the poetic structure (i.e., the rhyme). Thus, if one were to compare the statistics regarding finals of masculine whole phrases with those regarding the "finals" of feminine whole phrases, one would not be comparing points that are equivalent from the musical standpoint: the latter may refer to the penultimate interval of the passage or even to a still earlier point.

While we may acknowledge the diligence shown in this monograph, the usefulness of some of the information, and the provocative quality of certain suggestions, this reviewer would caution the prospective reader to employ his critical faculties to their fullest when using this study. He would also urge a more adventurous attitude towards the further exploration of this vital body of music.

Leon Crickmore—*C.P.E. Bach: Six Harpsichord Concertos [Wq. 43]*

Birmingham: unpubl. thesis for the Master of Arts degree, University of Birmingham (England), 1956

Jane R. Stevens—*The Keyboard Concertos of Carl Phillipp Emanuel Bach*

Ann Arbor: University Microfilms (UM order No. 65-9718), 1965 (viii+301 pp., Yale University diss.)

Chester Fanning Smith

The master's thesis of Leon Crickmore appears slightly revised in *Music & Letters* (39/4: 227–41 [July 1958]). Here the title is altered from that of the original thesis to simply, "C. P. E. Bach's Harpsichord Concertos." That such a change in title is possible may give some conception of the nature of the thesis. Miss Stevens, on the other hand, sets out to discuss all 52 of the concertos and dutifully proceeds from the first to the last. The emphasis of both authors is on the form of the concertos.

About to embark upon an analysis of the form of C. P. E. Bach's harpsichord concertos, the student who is well aware of the chronology of music history will expect these works to stand somewhere between the Baroque concerto and the Classical concerto. Of course, in a literal sense they do. Both authors use this point of view as a basis for their discussions. To what extent, then, is C. P. E. Bach, whose father was his only teacher of composition, influenced by the Baroque concerto? And to what extent does his originality, to which Haydn and Mozart both paid tribute, lead toward the establishment of the Classical Concerto?

The two authors center their interest on the first movements of the harpsichord concertos. Each feels that the form of these movements is similar to the form of the fast movements of a Baroque concerto. The ritornello principle, upon which the discussions hinge, should perhaps be briefly stated. Torelli presents this principle very clearly in his concertos. The quick