

Jas, Eric. 2018. *Piety and Polyphony in Sixteenth-Century Holland: The Choirbooks of St Peter's Church, Leiden*. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music, 18. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.

Reviewed by Michael Gale

The six choirbooks compiled for St Peter's Church, Leiden during the mid-sixteenth century (now Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken, MSS. 1438-1443) stand as witnesses to a turbulent period in that city's history. Initially copied between 1549 and the mid-1560s, the choirbooks were present during the *Beeldenstorm* of August 1566, when Reformist zealots caused widespread damage to the interior of St Peter's and, having fallen from use following the establishment of Protestantism in Leiden in 1572, they survived the sieges by Spanish troops endured by the city in 1573-74. The enthusiastic destruction of church- and civic-owned property (including music books) during these upheavals has profoundly impoverished the modern-day historian; as Eric Jas points out in his introduction to this important study, these six manuscripts are "unique and extremely valuable evidence of a rich musical tradition in sixteenth-century Holland ... [and] very little of that tradition has been preserved in Dutch archives and libraries" (2).

Although they were described in print by J. P. N. Land as long ago as 1881 (Land 1874-1881), these substantial manuscripts remained relatively underexplored in the musicological literature until Jas's own doctoral dissertation (1997) over a century later. However, the last decade has seen a considerable resurgence of interest in these sources. The Dutch vocal ensemble the Egidius Kwartet (2015) recorded a double-CD volume devoted to each of the six choirbooks, initially released annually between 2010 and 2015, and these fine recordings have been complemented by the publication of open-access digital images of all six manuscripts (Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken, n.d.). Jas's book, a long-awaited and very welcome English-language revision of his earlier dissertation, is thus most rewarding when treated as a companion volume to these other media.

This book will undoubtedly invite some comparison with Reinhard Strohm's landmark study *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* (1985). Besides the relatively close proximity of their geographical focus, both studies also share a

Current Musicology

common aim: to place a substantial source of polyphony in its civic context, exploring the institutional and social organizations that supported this musical activity. By his own admission, Strohm initially conceived his study intending to focus squarely on the so-called “Lucca Choirbook”, copied c.1470 in Bruges at the behest of a wealthy Flemish merchant who subsequently gifted it to Lucca Cathedral (1985, rev. 1990, vi). However, the resulting monograph was much broader in scope, offering a vivid picture of the musical provision and devotional practices funded by the urban elite across late fifteenth-century Bruges, much of it concentrated around the collegiate church of St. Donatian.

Similarly, Eric Jas aims here to illuminate the six extant Leiden choirbooks through a study of the *zeven-getijdencollege* (‘college of the seven canonical hours’) at St. Peter’s, whose primary purpose was to oversee the daily celebration of the Divine Office, besides providing sung memorials for the souls of departed benefactors. But although both studies have at their heart a central musical source, their contextualizing strategies differ significantly. Strohm’s rich narrative probed the breadth of musical experience across the various churches, religious houses, and civic institutions of his chosen city – but, by focusing on Bruges in isolation, he left himself open to the charge of creating an artificial distinction between that city and other nearby (and contextually useful) urban centers such as Ghent and Antwerp (Fallows 1986, 279). Conversely, Jas takes a much narrower view of musical life in Leiden, focusing almost entirely on St Peter’s, but casts his net further afield in order to place this church in context. His opening chapter offers a useful survey of comparable *getijdencolleges* in other nearby Dutch towns from their establishment during the 1430s up to the cessation of Roman Catholic worship across this region by c.1570. In doing so, Jas shows how the *getijdencollege* at St Peter’s represented one node in a much broader network of similar institutions across the urban centers of the northern Netherlands.

Jas then focuses specifically on the *getijdencollege* at St Peter’s in his second chapter, from its first documentary traces in 1440 up to its dissolution in mid-1572. Besides offering a rich contextual backdrop for the Leiden choirbooks, these first two chapters also provide a wealth of information about the working practices of the singers within these institutions and the *zangmeesters* (choirmasters) who ran them. Jas draws upon a rich array of archival material (much of which he transcribes and translates in Appendix 1) to shed light upon the contractual obligations of these musicians, as well as the disciplinary measures they faced if they transgressed. The peripatetic nature of professional singers – who tended to move frequently between local urban centers in search

of better working conditions and remuneration – is a problem familiar to anyone working on the provision of polyphonic music during this period. Evidently, the challenge of retaining singers (and especially *zangmeesters*) was so acute that a number of towns across the northern Netherlands (including Leiden) reached formal reciprocal arrangements, agreeing not to hire any singer who had left his previous post within an allied institution during the past two years (20).

Jas's discussion of the surviving contract of Jacob Tick is also of particular interest (68-70). Tick served as *zangmeester* at St. Peter's from 1453 to around 1458 before moving on to subsequent posts in Brielle and Bruges. Besides the day-to-day running of the choir, Tick's duties at St. Peter's included teaching singing and discant to poor children from the local community, alongside those whose parents could afford to pay a weekly fee for this provision. In these cases, the town magistrate would determine what level of payment (if any) Tick would receive. As Jas points out, this remarkable document is "probably one of the earliest, if not the earliest, record[s] of income-related subsidized music education by a town government" (69).

Whilst Chapters 1 and 2 sketched out the organizational framework behind the musical provision at St. Peter's, it is only in the latter half of this study that we encounter a detailed discussion of the choirbooks themselves. Chapter 3 and Appendix 2 provide a thorough physical description and codicological analysis of the six manuscripts, whilst Chapter 4 outlines the repertory that they preserve. The musical importance of these sources is beyond doubt: they provide an unparalleled snapshot of the working repertory of the *getijdencollege* at St Peter's during the middle third of the sixteenth century, containing some 350-odd pieces (around 330 individual works, but with some duplication and fragmentary material). They contain a wide range of musical materials: the choir's core repertory consisted predominantly of Masses, *Magnificat* settings and motets by Clemens non Papa and Thomas Crecquillon, alongside copies of some of the most widely disseminated motets of the early sixteenth century (e.g. Josquin's *Benedicta es, caelorum regina* and *Stabat mater*, Clemens non Papa's *Maria Magdalena*, etc.). But there is also a good deal of music here by lesser-known local figures, most notably the 60 or so works by Johannes Flamingus (mostly dated c.1565-67).

In many ways, Chapter 3 is an exemplary codicological study: Jas skillfully analyzes the scribal habits of the various contributors and reveals a good deal about the identities of the two main scribes. Most important of these is Anthonius de Blauwe (d.1573), a local professional scribe who is named on the colophons to MS. 1438 (dated 1549) and MSS. 1439-40 (both dated 1559).

However, Jas also presents a persuasive argument for attributing some contributions in the other three manuscripts to De Blauwe, although he tempers this discussion with a laudable (but probably unnecessary) dose of scholarly caution. Of the other contributing scribes, the most significant is Johannes Flamingus, *zangmeester* at St Peter's during the mid-1560s and the composer of numerous pieces in MSS. 1441–43. Jas argues that, far from being a homogenous group of sources, this set of manuscripts reveals the range of different products that a professional scribe such as De Blauwe might have offered his clients: from lavish high-quality items like MSS. 1438–40, through to more functional (and presumably cheaper) documents like MS. 1441, and so-called 'fascicle manuscripts' (e.g. MSS. 1442–43), apparently collections of individual gatherings which were bound together later (perhaps for safekeeping).

There is a great deal of information in this study which is tied very closely to the specific milieu under examination, but, for those readers with a more generalized interest in the transmission of sixteenth-century polyphony, it is Jas's work on Anthonius de Blauwe that may well stand out as one of the most revelatory aspects of this book. Certainly, Jas is impressively insightful when analyzing scribal hands and cogently describing his sources, but this chapter goes well beyond merely being a traditional "source study". Rather than reverting to description for description's sake, Jas uses this work as the basis for a case study which provides valuable insights into the working practices of a mid-sixteenth-century professional scribe and his place within the mercantile urban economy.

Anthonius de Blauwe first appears in the Leiden records in 1546 and, by the mid-1550s, he was running a private handwriting school close to St Peter's where his son Jan served as a choirboy in the *getijdencollege* (86–98). In 1567, De Blauwe was appointed to a schoolmaster position at the nearby *Heilige-Geesthuis*, an institution providing education and lodgings for local orphans. Alongside his teaching activities, De Blauwe was active as a professional music scribe, receiving commissions from churches in nearby Gouda and Delft (1547–49) and later producing several items for St. Peter's, his own local parish church. Again, Jas guides us skillfully through the archival documents, quoting several within this chapter and in Appendix 1 (205–212). These reveal fascinating information about both the production of the choirbooks (e.g. the costs associated with the labor and materials) and the ways in which De Blauwe procured musical materials for inclusion in them. They also offer glimpses of De Blauwe's broader working practices – for instance, how he kept back copies of motets he had already included in earlier projects (96). One particularly illuminating document records De Blauwe asking the authorities at St Peter's to return a choirbook

already completed for them so he could sell it quickly to a newly identified client in England (95-6). Thankfully, they agreed (although De Blauwe was obliged to replace it later with a newly copied text) – a precious trace of a hitherto unrecorded Anglo-Netherlandish musical exchange. (Sadly, the English client remains unnamed in the correspondence.) Together, these sources yield new insights into the commercial backdrop to the scribal profession, something often overlooked as we concentrate our scholarly efforts on the surviving products of their labor. Furthermore, this engaging chapter reminds us how traditional source studies – which have had a bad rap in some musicological circles over the past few decades – can still offer us fresh perspectives on the place of music-making in early modern society, if placed within a suitably meaningful contextual frame.

Finally, Chapter 4 discusses the repertory preserved in the choirbooks and, as Jas himself points out, there is still plenty more work to be done here beyond the scope of this book, e.g. comparing the Leiden readings of well-known works with those transmitted in other sources (3). However, Jas’s claim that this study does not consider individual pieces from “an analytic or stylistic point of view” is only partially true. In fact, he shows us convincingly (on stylistic grounds) that the 22 or so unascribed pieces in the hand of Johannes Flamingus (all *unica* in MS 1442) are also very likely to be his own compositions (157-63).

There is, however, one significant lapse in logic during Jas’s discussion of Flamingus. I found it difficult to accept the suggestion that, as a skilled composer, *zangmeester* and scribe, Flamingus had twice erroneously written the date “1576” alongside different pieces in MS. 1442 when he had actually meant “1567” (119, n.82; 284, n.2). Nor was it clear why Jas suggests that MS. 1442, a collection of previously separate fascicles, “cannot have been compiled and bound before 1567, the year Flamingus copied his final works for the *getijdenzangers* in Leiden” (140; cf. also 284).

Not much is known about the later career of Johannes Flamingus. He is listed as *zangmeester* at St. Peter’s in documents from March 1566 and November 1567, before moving on to a post at Schwerin (1571-73). His last known position was as a *cantor* in Zwickau later in 1573 (Kongsted 2001) but, after that, the trail goes cold. But is there any good reason to suppose that he did not return to Leiden at some point in the mid-1570s, if we are to take the two “1576” inscriptions in MS. 1442 at face value? Of course, the *getijdencollege* at St Peter’s had been dissolved since July 1572, but the fate of these choirbooks during those next few years remains unclear – and it is not actually certain whether MS. 1442

Current Musicology

even was a “choirbook” at this stage (rather than simply a bundle of loose gatherings).

This question brings us to the final decades of the sixteenth century, a tantalizing gap in these manuscripts’ history and a frustrating (though understandable) omission from Jas’s study. During the years immediately after the suppression of Catholicism in Leiden, the whereabouts of these choirbooks and their usage (if any) remains unknown. But, in late 1578, a group of prominent Leiden citizens – describing themselves as “the brotherhood and common assembly of those who are united in music here in Leiden” – petitioned the city’s magistrate, asking for the books (then a group of eight, rather than the six now extant) to be placed in their care (126). Under the agreed terms of this arrangement, they dutifully compiled a detailed written description of the manuscripts (which, incidentally, is the earliest evidence of MS. 1442 existing as a single bound volume) and retained them until 1597, when the keeper wrote again, asking to return them to the city’s care. All three documents are usefully transcribed and translated by Jas in Appendix 1 (212-217).

Clearly, the choirbooks were still valued and were (probably) being used in some circles, even if they no longer played a role in public worship at the newly Protestant St. Peter’s. But the identity of these circles is a vexing question: Jas states that “we do not know who actually performed from them, but the group likely included some former singers of St Peter’s” (126), but without clarifying whether there is no known extant evidence – or if that question has simply not yet been pursued. It is here that a much broader survey of the musical culture of Leiden might just bear fruit. Just as Reinhard Strohm explored the wider urban soundscape of fifteenth-century Bruges – the various religious houses and the confraternities, the court and civic events, and so on – so a wider exploration of music-making across Leiden (looking beyond the confines of St Peter’s and its *getijdencollege*) might hold some answers.

Late sixteenth-century Leiden was a musically vibrant city: the foundation of its university in 1575 certainly contributed to that, and there is a good deal more to learn about both recreational music-making and private devotional practices amongst the mercantile elite and the academic community, as well within lower-status groups. Jas’s hunch that some of the former singers from St. Peter’s retained an interest in these manuscripts is surely a secure one: since the dissolution of their *getijdencollege*, those musicians must have gone somewhere, either seeking work as professional singers elsewhere or pursuing other types of employment within Leiden. If Jas’s impressively detailed reconstruction of De Blauwe’s life and business activities from local archival sources is anything to go

by, there is no reason to suppose that these singers cannot also be traced and, with a little luck, some further light can be cast upon the post-1572 afterlife of these manuscripts. Of course, this suggestion is not intended as criticism of this impressive study; after all, any scholarly investigation on this scale needs to be limited in scope in order to maintain its coherence and clarity. But I very much hope that Jas's fine work in this book will also serve as a catalyst for further research on post-Reformation music-making in this important urban center.

In summary, Jas has admirably achieved his stated aims in this volume, enhancing our understanding of these important sources through a detailed codicological study and his thorough examination of their historical context within the *getijdencollege* at St. Peter's. But this rather undersells the importance of this book, for it is also an illuminating contribution to what Tim Carter (and others) have termed "urban musicology" (Carter 2002) in which Jas has combined his deep understanding of these manuscripts and his expertise as an archival historian to powerful effect. In doing so, Jas has also achieved here much of what Fiona Kisby demanded back in 2001 when setting out her agenda for a music-orientated urban history: he has "show[n] how music shaped space and time within the urban environment and how the various institutions, organisations, associations and social structures which developed in towns and cities in response to the process of urbanisation had an impact on musical activity of various kinds" (Kisby 2001, 6).

It goes without saying that this book will be of enormous interest to those working on musical provision or devotional practices across the Low Countries during the age of the Reformation. But this engaging study also reveals a good deal more about aspects of the early modern music profession – the careers (and migrations) of singers and choirmasters, the economic considerations and commercial strategies behind professional manuscript production – as well as about the compilation of the choirbooks themselves. As such, it should also hold a broader appeal to anyone with a wider interest in the musical culture of the sixteenth century.

References

- Carter, Tim. 2002. "The Sound of Silence: Models for an Urban Musicology". *Urban History* 29 (1): 8-18.
- Egidius Kwartet & College. 2015. *De Leidse Koorboeken/The Leiden Choirbooks*. Etcetera CD KTC 1416. Also published as six individual CD volumes as KTC 1410–1415 (2010–15).

Current Musicology

- Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken. n.d. "Koorboeken Pieterskerk." Digital images online at: <https://www.erfgoedleiden.nl/schatkamer/koorboeken-pieterskerk> (accessed 3 August 2020).
- Fallows, David. 1986. "[Review of] *Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400-1505: The Creation of a Musical Centre in the Fifteenth Century* by Lewis Lockwood; *Music in Late Medieval Bruges* by Reinhard Strohm." *Early Music History* 6: 279-303.
- Jas, Eric. 1997. "De koorboeken van de Pieterskerk te Leiden: Het zestiende-eeuwse muzikale erfgoed van een Hollands getijdencollege." Ph.D. diss., Utrecht University.
- Kisby, Fiona. 2001. "Urban History, Musicology and Cities and Towns in Renaissance Europe." In *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Cities and Towns*, ed. Fiona Kisby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-13.
- Kongsted, Ole. 2001. "Flamingus, Johannes." *Grove Music Online*. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051998> (accessed 4 August 2020).
- Land, J. P. N. 1874-81. "De Koorboeken van de St. Pieterskerk te Leiden." In *Bouwsteenen: Derde Jaarboek der Vereeniging voor Noord-Nederlands Muziekgeschiedenis*: 37-48.
- Strohm, Reinhard. 1985, rev. 1990. *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.