IX WORK DISCUSSION 6:
Pierre de la Rue, *Missa de feria*

ANDREW H. WEAVER

Among the types of polyphonic masses cultivated during the Renaissance, the *Missa de feria* is by far the most unassuming.[1] Liturgically, a "feria" is any day that is neither a Sunday nor a specific feast; that is, it is a typical weekday, which makes the ferial mass the lowest-ranking mass in the liturgy. As such, the ordinary chants sung on these days are among the shortest and simplest in the repertoire, and the Gloria and Credo are typically omitted entirely.[2] When set polyphonically, a *Missa de feria* typically follows the model of the "plainchant mass", in that, rather than featuring one cantus firmus that appears throughout the mass, each section sets the appropriate ordinary chant (a Kyrie chant in the Kyrie, a Sanctus chant in the Sanctus, etc.). As is to be expected from its low liturgical rank, polyphonic ferial masses typically feature simple polyphony and unassuming, homorhythmic textures; in fact, many existing polyphonic ferial masses seem to be examples of extemporised polyphony that just happened to have been written down.[3]

Even just a cursory glance at Pierre de la Rue's *Missa de feria* reveals his work to be an outlier among typical works of the genre. Not only does his mass contain a Gloria and a Credo, but it is also composed for five voices, placing it among the grandest examples of liturgical polyphony of the early sixteenth century. The mass features rich, complex polyphony throughout, and, even more striking, every movement is built upon a strict two-voice canon in the tenor voices, thereby exhibiting the most

1 For an overview of polyphonic settings of the *Missa de feria* during the Renaissance, see Weaver, "Aspects of Musical Borrowing".

2 The proper chants sung at a ferial mass simply repeat those from the preceding Sunday or feast.

3 For examples in modern edition, see the two anonymous ferial masses in Snow (ed.), *A New World Collection*, 125–28, 140–47.

erudite form of composed polyphony of the day – the very opposite of extemporised counterpoint. The explanation for this unusually opulent setting of a lowly mass genre can most likely be found in La Rue's employment at the Habsburg-Burgundian court. We know from court ordinances that the chapel was expected to sing polyphony at mass every day,[4] and given the role that music played in the Renaissance in enhancing the prestige of rulers, it makes sense that the Habsburgs would desire the singing of rich polyphony at daily mass. Such concerns would have been especially pressing in the early sixteenth century, as the court was still smarting from the loss of the Duchy of Burgundy at Charles the Bold's death in 1477 and the untimely death of Philip the Fair in 1506. Although we have no concrete evidence as to when or why La Rue wrote his *Missa de feria*, it seems logical to hypothesise that he did so upon a commission from his employer within the first two decades of the sixteenth century, probably during the years 1508–15, which Honey Meconi speculates was an especially productive period of his career.[5]

Two pieces of evidence support this hypothesis about the genesis of La Rue's mass. The first is its wide transmission, in seven manuscripts produced by the Alamire scriptorium (only five other La Rue masses survive in this many Habsburg-Burgundian sources).[6] Four of these manuscripts (B-Br 15075, E-MO 773, E-MO 766, and Mech) seem to have been intended for various members of the Habsburg family; that there was a desire for La Rue's mass to be copied multiple times for the family's use seems to indicate that it was intended to be performed frequently and at a variety of the Habsburg households. Another of the Alamire sources, I-Rvat 34, is a lavish manuscript that was created as a gift for Pope Leo X; this source explicitly titles La Rue's mass *Missa de feria*, which may very well have been an attempt to showcase to the Pope the elaborate polyphony that was sung daily at the Habsburg court.[7] The second piece of evidence supporting the claim that the Habsburgs commissioned La Rue's mass as a way to bolster their prestige is the fact that the mass

4 See, for instance, the ordinance from 1469 (subsequently reissued in 1497 and 1500) transcribed in Fallows, "Specific Information", 145–59.
5 Meconi, *Pierre de la Rue*, 107–8.
6 The sources for La Rue's mass are listed in Appendix 4. Details about the sources are available in Meconi, *Pierre de La Rue*, 271–81. One mass by La Rue, *Missa Conceptio tua*, survives in eight Habsburg-Burgundian sources.
7 The remaining two Habsburg-Burgundian sources, D-Ju 5 and A-Wn 18832, were commissioned by Frederick the Wise and Raimond Fugger the Elder, respectively.

seems to have served as a model for the *Missa de feria* by French court composer Antoine de Févin.[8] Like La Rue's mass, Févin's is a large-scale work (with a Gloria and Credo) for five voices, featuring elaborate polyphony and a two-voice canonic scaffold in every movement; it seems very likely that the French court, the Habsburgs' bitter political rival, commissioned Févin to compose his *Missa de feria* in response to La Rue's, to assert that they too sang elaborate polyphony every day.

Mech is among the earliest of the sources to transmit La Rue's *Missa de feria*; E-MO 773, Mech, and I-Rvat 34 were all probably completed by March 1516, with the first two possibly originating as early as 1508.[9] Mech is unique among these sources in that it transmits the Agnus Dei with only two sections, lacking the two-voice "Agnus" II found in the other sources. It is common for La Rue's masses to have only two sections for the Agnus Dei, so the composer may have originally conceived the *Missa de feria* with a two-section Agnus. If this is the case, then Mech may very well be the earliest manuscript to contain La Rue's mass.[10] If La Rue originally conceived the mass without the "Agnus" II, it is ironic that precisely that section seems to have had lasting popularity outside the court. It appears in A-Wn 18832, an Alamire manuscript of *bicinia* (two-voiced pieces) commissioned by Raimond Fugger the Elder, and it also is the only part of the mass to appear in non-court sources: the later manuscript D-Mbs 260 and Georg Rhau's 1545 print *Bicinia gallica, latina, germanica* (RISM 1545[6]), where it is fitted with the text "Ne temere quid loquaris".

As we would expect from the genre, La Rue's mass is based on plainchant. Rather than featuring a single cantus firmus that appears in each movement, each section is based on the corresponding chant of the mass ordinary. La Rue's mass is unusual, however, in that we can identify the chant models definitively for only two movements, the Gloria and Credo, which are based on the chants now labelled Gloria XV and Credo I in the *Liber usualis*.[11] These are the same chants used in Févin's *Missa de*

8 For a comparison of La Rue's and Févin's masses and an argument that La Rue's served as the model for Févin's (and not vice versa), see Weaver, "Aspects of Musical Borrowing", 130–37.

9 See Kellman (ed.), *The Treasury* for details on these sources.

10 Kreider suggests this in CMM 97/2, lxiii.

11 Kreider claims that the first section of the Agnus is based on Agnus XV (CMM 97/2, lxii), but the connection between the melodies is very tenuous and extends no further than the first phrase. The more typical choice for ferial masses was Agnus XVIII.

feria, as well as a four-voice ferial mass by Matthaeus Pipelare, and thus they seem to be the standard choices for weekdays on which these movements are sung. That we cannot identify the other chants is not unique, as La Rue composed a number of masses based on unidentifiable plainchants.[12] Nevertheless, La Rue's use of no-longer-identifiable chants raises a host of unanswerable questions: did the Habsburg-Burgundian court follow a unique liturgical use that has not survived, or was La Rue drawing instead upon plainchants that he would have known from his youth and early career?[13] If the latter, did it matter to the court (and to La Rue's fellow singers) whether they knew the chant models, and if not, what does that tell us about the function and perception of liturgical polyphony at the Habsburg-Burgundian court? Did the function of this mass as a vehicle for courtly prestige trump its function as the transmitter of venerable plainchant?

La Rue's treatment of the chant in the two movements in which we can identify the models is consistent enough to make inferences about his use of the chant throughout the mass. The canonic tenor voices consistently carry only the chant melody. As is typical for La Rue, the melodies are frequently highly decorated, sometimes to the point of being unrecognisable. Although the tenors sing only chant, the chant is not restricted to just those voices. Whenever there is a long stretch of rests in the tenor, the chant appears in one or more of the other voices. Sometimes it appears as a point of imitation, as in the opening bars of the Gloria (bb. 1–10) and the opening bars of the "Et incarnatus est" of the Credo (bb. 77–81), but more often it appears in just one voice. In one instance, it appears in multiple voices in quick succession: at the start of the "Qui tollis" of the Gloria, the chant begins in the tenors on the text "qui tollis peccata mundi" (bb. 60–66), moves to the bassus for "miserere nobis" (bb. 66–68), then to the superius (highly decorated) for the repeat of "qui tollis peccata mundi" (bb. 69–74), and finally back to the tenors, where it remains for the rest of the movement. Throughout both movements, whenever the chant migrates to a voice other than the tenor, the phrase sung by the other voice never reappears in the tenor, with the result that the chant is sung in its entirety throughout the movement, with no gaps or repetitions.

12 Meconi, *Pierre de la Rue*, 115. See also Meconi's chapter in the present book about the *Missa Alleluya*.

13 A special liturgy was also proposed for Maximilian I's court on the basis of an examination of Heinrich Isaac's *Choralis Constantinus*; see Pätzig, "Liturgische Grundlagen".

The most notable stylistic feature of La Rue's mass is the canon in the tenors, which not only is used as a scaffold for each movement but also betrays clear large-scale planning across the mass as a whole: in the Kyrie, the rhythmic interval between the canonic voices is a semibreve; this increases to a breve in the Gloria, and each successive movement increases the distance by another breve, concluding with four breves in the Agnus. The ever-increasing distance between the tenors allowed La Rue to play with a variety of textures throughout the mass. In the earlier movements, the canonic voices tend to be integrated into the full-voice texture, but as the canonic interval increases in the Sanctus and Agnus, La Rue explores other possibilities, such as greater rhythmic differentiation among the voices, more transparent textures in which the tenors do not overlap, and even (as we shall see) a maximally imitative texture in the final Agnus. The only sections without canon are those for fewer than five voices: the two-voice "Pleni" and three-voice "Benedictus" in the Sanctus, as well as the two-voice "Agnus" II (not included in Mech). Skillful treatment of canon is one of the signatures of La Rue's style: two other masses (*Missa L'homme armé II* and *Missa Incessament*), as well as the single-movement *Kyrie pascale*, feature canonic foundations similar to that in the *Missa de feria*, and canonic foundations also appear in one motet (*Pater de coelis deus*) and six chansons (*Adieu comment*, *Cent mille regretz*, *Dueil et ennuy*, *Fors seulement*, *Incessament*, and *Je n'ay regretz*).[14] In addition, La Rue composed two masses, three motets, and two chansons that are entirely canonic, and canonic sections appear in five other masses.[15]

While the deliberately planned use of canon helps bind the movements of the *Missa de feria* together, other musical features help provide a more audible large-scale coherence. All movements are in *tempus imperfectum* (with just one brief move to *tempus perfectum* for the "Confiteor" in the Credo, bb. 203–27), and they all feature the same modal final of E. Interior cadences at the ends of sections occur almost entire-

14 Another motet with a canonic foundation, *Laudate Dominum*, was long thought to be by La Rue, but Wolfgang Fuhrmann has recently argued convincingly against the attribution; see Fuhrmann, "Who Composed Pierre de la Rue's Psalm-Motets?".

15 The canonic masses are *Missa Ave sanctissima Maria* and *Missa O salutaris hostia*. The canonic motets are *Ave sanctissima Maria*, *Da pacem domine*, and *Salve regina I*. The canonic chansons are *En espoir vis* and *Je ne dis mot*. The masses with canonic sections are *Missa Conceptio tua*, *Missa de Sancto Job*, *Missa de septem doloribus*, *Missa L'homme armé I*, and *Missa Sancta dei genitrix*. La Rue's *Magnificat primi toni* also contains two canonic sections. For information on La Rue's use of canon, see Meconi, *Pierre de la Rue*, 101–4.

ly on E or G, with interior cadences on A in the Sanctus. In addition, a brief four-note scalar motive, always with the same rhythm (dotted minim followed by three semiminims), appears frequently in all voices throughout the mass (including the duos and trios).

INDIVIDUAL MOVEMENT DISCUSSION

Although we cannot today identify the chant models for the Kyrie, La Rue must have almost certainly expected listeners who knew the melodies to be able to recognise them, for phrases from the tenors permeate the other voices, especially in the "Kyrie" I and "Christe". In the "Kyrie" I, the tenors do not enter until b. 10, but prior to their entrance we hear their first phrase presented as a point of imitation, first in the bassus and altus (bb. 1–4, in a quasi-canon that presages the tenors' entrance) and then in the superius (bb. 5–8), where it is sung atop a new, seemingly freely composed phrase (also presented imitatively) featuring the four-note scalar motive (▶ p. 215 ▶ Ex. IX.1). Likewise, the "Christe" begins with a distinctive five-note phrase presented imitatively by the altus, bassus, and superius in turn; when the tenors enter with the same phrase in b. 31, the other voices temporarily drop out, highlighting the melody even further. This same phrase recurs prominently at the end of the section: it appears in the superius in bb. 43–46, after which it is again taken up by the tenors before the superius enters with it one last time in b. 50 to close out the section.

"Kyrie" II, which (as is typical) is longer than the previous sections, contains a wider variety of melodic material than the previous sections; none of the melodic material here repeats phrases from earlier in the movement, suggesting that the chant melody is through-composed. "Kyrie" II as a whole divides into four distinct sections, each of which is underlaid with a complete statement of "Kyrie eleison". In the first section (bb. 54–61), in which the tenors do not appear, the cantus, bassus, and altus in turn present a four-bar phrase as a point of imitation; in contrast to "Kyrie" I and "Christe", this phrase is not later sung by the tenors. The tenors open the second section (bb. 62–72) with a rhythmically active three-bar phrase that opens with the four-note scalar motive. This section features clear textural contrast, the likes of which have not yet been heard in the work, in which phrases for the tenors and bassus alternate with phrases for the altus and superius alone; while not identical, the phrases seem to present variants of the same material. The third section (bb. 72–80) also

begins with the lower three voices, seemingly continuing the textural alternation of the previous section, especially since the tenors' melody once again opens with the scalar motive. Underneath the tenors, however, the bassus sings a new melody, which is soon taken up by the superius and altus in imitation (bb. 75–77) and eventually is sung by the tenors (bb. 78–81). The final section (bb. 81–91) also features melodic interplay between the tenors and other voices; in this case, the superius opens the section with a five-bar phrase that is taken up by the tenors in b. 84.

The Gloria is surprisingly economical;[16] despite having a much longer text than the Kyrie, it contains only thirty more bars and lasts just thirty-eight seconds longer than the Kyrie in its sole recording.[17] This may be a reflection of the brevity typically expected of ferial masses. One way La Rue achieves this economy is by avoiding imitation; aside from the beginning of the movement, which (as mentioned above) presents the first phrase of chant as a point of imitation in altus, superius, and bassus, the only other imitation throughout the rest of the movement is that between the two canonic voices (as well as one brief passage, in bb. 35–38, in which the non-canonic voices toss about a brief motive on "Deus pater"). The text is declaimed primarily in semibreves and minims, avoiding lengthy melismas and text repetition; the only notable instance of text repetition occurs at the end of the first section (bb. 52–59), where the text "filius patris" is sung twice, including a repetition of the chant phrase in the tenors. The movement falls into the two traditional sections, with the second commencing with "Qui tollis". The second section, in which the mensuration changes from C to C2, moves at seemingly breakneck speed, with the basic unit of declamation the semiminim until the appearance of expansive melismas on "in gloria Dei patris Amen" in the final thirteen bars.

At 259 bars, the Credo is more than twice as long as the Gloria, though here too La Rue employs the same features to avoid excessive length, generally avoiding imitation, melismas, and text repetition (though the latter is basically unavoidable at the ends of sections, given the two-breve rhythmic interval between the tenors). This does not, however, make for a boring movement, as La Rue does occasionally draw upon imita-

16 This is also the case in the *Missa Ave Maria*; see Rothenberg's chapter in the present book.
17 Hyperion 1997.

tive techniques, often to surprisingly expressive effect. The movement falls into three sections (breaking at "Et incarnatus est" and "Crucifixus"), and especially at the beginnings of sections, La Rue introduces stylistic changes that differentiate the section from what came before while also emphasising the text. At the start of the second section, for instance, La Rue stresses the theologically significant text by omitting the tenors and presenting the chant as a point of imitation in superius, bassus, and altus. This entire section (bb. 77–102) has notably sparser textures than the first, as well as slower declamation (breves and semibreves as opposed to semibreves and minims); this allows for a clearer understanding of the text in performance, while also emphasising the statements of "ex Maria Virgine" and "et homo factus est" in the tenors.

Even more striking is the opening of the third section, which begins with the tenors alone on "crucifixus etiam pro nobis" (bb. 103–8); this is by far the sparsest texture in the entire mass, with tenor 1 alone for a full two bars on the significant word "crucifixus". The other voices gradually begin to enter as the tenors drop out and the chant migrates to bassus (bb. 109–12) and altus (bb. 111–17); the full five-voice texture is not achieved until the tenors re-enter at "et resurrexit" (starting b. 115). La Rue uses imitation to emphasise the text "et ascendit in caelum", stating the chant melody in the superius in bb. 124–25 as fore-imitation to tenor 1, which enters in b. 126. Another striking moment occurs a few bars later, in bb. 132–34, when the text "sedet ad dexteram Patris" is sung in tenor 2 in a homorhythmic, *fauxbourdon*-like texture with bassus and altus. One final noteworthy moment is La Rue's treatment of the "Confiteor" (bb. 203–28), for which he shifts to *tempus perfectum* and introduces a notably more imitative texture. An especially expressive moment occurs in bb. 215–23, when he breaks up the texture into various duos and trios that sing homorhythmically with the tenors on the text "et exspecto resurrectionem" (▶ Ex. IX.2). This simultaneously heightens the text repetition between the tenors and also creates the most homorhythmic textures in the movement. The very end of the movement features what seems to be a clear sign that the manuscript was used for performance, as a seemingly later hand added a sharp sign before the final *B* in the altus, the only such marking in the piece.

The Sanctus opens with a texture unlike anything heard up to this point in the mass, with longheld notes in superius and bassus framing fast-moving, long-breathed melodies in the inner voices (▶ Ex. IX.3). For

▶ p. 216

the first fourteen bars we never hear more than two voices with any kind of rhythmic motion singing simultaneously, creating a transparent texture that highlights the melodies. First the altus is supported by the long notes of superius and bassus, and upon reaching a cadence in b. 5, tenor 2 enters with the same melody down a fifth; this is presumably the chant melody, which means that as in the Kyrie, La Rue is highlighting the chant, such that listeners who know the melody would immediately recognise it. As tenor 2 sings the melody, the altus continues with a countermelody that seems to be a decorated version of tenor 2's second phrase (which does not begin until b. 11). Altus and tenor 2 cadence in b. 8, as tenor 1 enters with its canonic answer; at this point, the superius is released from its long notes and sings the countermelody just heard in the altus. The sparse texture, which continues until b. 20 (on the word "dominus"), is made possible by the fact that up to that point, tenor 2 never commences its next phrase until tenor 1 has completed its canonic answer. The texture begins to thicken already in b. 13, however, for at that point the bassus stops its long notes and begins moving at the same pace as the other voices. The other five-voice section of the movement, the "Osanna", also features long, held notes and sparse textures, though the tables have turned, for now the long notes appear in the tenors. The tenors' notably slower pace comes to an end only in the final bars (bb. 93–105), at which point their melody is so similar to the other voices that it may be freely composed, an idea that is supported by the fact that the text underlay here is a second statement of "Osanna in excelsis". The sections for reduced voices feature especially long-breathed phrases and much imitative interplay between the voices. It is impossible to know whether these sections allude to chant; however, for the first sixteen bars of the three-voice "Benedictus", the altus moves at a notably slower rate, is less florid, and has a smaller range than the other voices, so it may very well be based upon a chant melody.

In the opening section of the Agnus Dei, La Rue continues the pattern first seen in the canonic voices of the Sanctus, in which long stretches of rests between phrases result in the voices rarely singing simultaneously. For this reason, the section consists primarily of four-voice textures, with very little easily audible imitation. The only obvious imitation occurs at the beginning of the movement, where the superius and bassus anticipate tenor 1's melody in close imitation in the opening three bars (in a manner that once again highlights the presumed chant melody).

The overall pace of this section feels quite slow, with the melodies moving primarily in breves and semibreves (with occasional semiminim decoration). The final "Agnus" contrasts completely – almost shockingly so – with melodies now moving primarily in minims and semiminims, and a profusion of imitation. This section is by far the most thoroughly imitative passage of the entire mass, and is achieved by inserting points of imitation around the statements in the tenors. The opening bars (▶ Ex. IX.4), for instance, begin with tenor 1, who is answered two bars later by the altus, a third above; two bars later, tenor 2 begins the canonic answer, followed after another two bars by the superius. Underneath all of this, the bassus sings a two-and-a-half-bar figure that continually repeats, rising a third on each statement. This rhythmically active imitative texture continues for every phrase of the section, becoming even busier as we approach the final cadence. In bb. 116–18, for instance, altus, bassus, and superius enter with imitative points all within the space of two breves, creating the effect of imitative entries piling up on top of each other, thereby highlighting the complexity of this unusually sophisticated and unmistakably impressive *Missa de feria*.

▶ p. 217