Towards a History of Sonic Experience in the Renaissance

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BIO:

Born in Milan (Italy) in 1975, Daniele V. Filippi studied in Cremona and in Heidelberg. He graduated in Musicology in 1999 with a dissertation on Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's *Motecta festorum totius anni*. He has completed his PhD in 2004. Married, with two children, he lives in Milan and works as a consultant editor at Adelphi, one of Italy's most prestigious publishing houses. Meanwhile, he is developing the present project, started at the University of Pavia in 2010/2011 (Department of Musicology, Cremona) and continued as independent research in 2011/2012. In 2012/2013 he will be a visiting fellow at the Jesuit Institute, Boston College, where he will work on the next phase of the project, 'The Soundscape of Early Modern Catholicism'.

MAIN PUBLICATIONS:

- Article: *Rome, Madrid, Warsaw: Polychorality and Sonic Creativity in the Music of Tomás Luis de Victoria and Giovanni Francesco Anerio*, in *Polychoral Music in Italy and in Central-Eastern Europe at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by A. Patalas and M. Toffetti, Fondazione Levi, Venezia, 2012 («TRA.DI.MUS., Studi e monografie», 1), 229-280.

- Article: *Earthly Music, Interior Hearing, and Celestial Harmonies. Philippe de Monte's First Book of Spiritual Madrigals (1581)*, in «Journal of the Alamire Foundation», 3/2, 2011, 208-234.

- Book: *Tomás Luis de Victoria*, L'Epos, Palermo, 2008 («Constellatio musica», 16).

- Book: *Selva armonica. La musica spirituale a Roma tra Cinque e Seicento*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2008 («Speculum musicae», 12).

- Critical edition: GIOVANNI FRANCESCO ANERIO, *Selva armonica*, A-R Editions, Middleton (Wisconsin), 2006 («Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era», 141).

- Critical edition: GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA, *Motecta festorum totius anni cum communi sanctorum quaternis vocibus (1563)*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2003 («Diverse voci…», 2).

SELECTED FORTHCOMING ARTICLES:

- *Text, Form, and Style in Franchino Gaffurio's Motets*, in: *On the relationship of imitation and text treatment? The Motet around 1500*, ed. by Thomas Schmidt-Beste, Brepols, Turnhout, [2012].

- *Sonic Afterworld. Mapping the Soundscape of Heaven and Hell in Early Modern Cities*, in *Noise, Audition, Aurality: Histories of the Sonic World(s) of Europe, circa 1500-1900*, ed. by I.D. Biddle and Kirsten Gibson, Ashgate, Farnham, [2012].

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ABSTRACT:

In the properly *musical* ambit of sonic experience, the European Renaissance is characterized by an unparalleled enrichment. The multiplication of genres, the experimentation of new sonic solutions (polychorality, concertato…), the progressive growth of formal architectures, the development of instrumental families and their repertoire – just to mention some of the most striking features – determined a dramatic expansion of opportunities. Around all this, there are the *non- (or para-) musical* elements of sonic experience, still much too neglected by music historians.

The aim of the present project (http://www.sonicexperience.org/) is to raise, or re-evaluate, some great questions concerning the musical civilization of the Renaissance, focusing on sonic experience and its fundamental elements: non-musical factors, silence, the voice, instrumental sound, the perceivable aspects of musical structures, the co-presence of persistent and innovative phenomena, the spatial and temporal accessibility of music, and the symbolic apparatus connected to all these topics.

In this paper I will present evidence derived from the case studies analyzed during the first phase of the project, and argue for a more decidedly *sonic* approach to Renaissance music history. How will our historical view change, once we reassess the importance of analytical parameters such as perceivable form, dimensions and proportions, sonic styles, besides those usually favored by Renaissance musicologists (form viewed from the perspective of the composer, 'hidden' structures, motivics)? And what will happen, if we try to explain the development of early modern sonic cultures in terms of a circular interaction between concrete aural experiences and a complex system of archetypes and symbols?

Text

Preliminary remarks

The research project about which I will talk started in 2010 thanks to a grant from the University of Pavia at Cremona. After the first year, dedicated to some case studies, shortage of funding forced me to delay the working-out of the main conceptual framework. Though, the project continued as independent research, until I had the possibility of relaunching it and redefine its second phase, thanks to a fellowship from the Jesuit Institute at the Boston College, starting next September. [**see the leaflet…**]. Because of this complicated history, this paper has more the nature of a window on a work-in-progress than that of a final report.

Introduction

The project rests on three main methodological pillars:

      a) the integration of different perspectives, from different disciplines

      b) the awareness of the mutual interaction between experience and symbolic systems

      c) a realistic, phenomenological approach to music analysis.

Some explanations are in order.

a) In Autumn 2009, preparing a seminar on the soundscapes of Italian Renaissance cities, I had the opportunity of immersing myself in the field of urban studies. The mixed nature of this cross-discipline was for me a revelation of how crucial it is to consider different elements, different levels and different points of view, and to make them mutually react in new ways in order to structure them in a coherent perspective. Even though in other branches this **inclusive approach** is probably taken for granted, I think that Renaissance musicology still has much to learn in this respect. Our 'history of music in the Renaissance' is still mostly a history of composition (*written* composition), a history of top-level individuals and institutions, and is still awaiting to be studied with the tools of recent disciplines, such as the history of senses and perception, sonic studies, etc., and in a general perspective of cultural history. This point would need a much more extensive discussion, but I am sure that you understand what I mean.

b) One of my case studies was dedicated to the notion of 'otherworldly' soundscapes (the soundscape of heaven and hell) in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century culture, and to the interaction between celestial and terrestrial soundscapes in early modern cities. If, on the one hand, the conception of a celestial soundscape animated by voices and instruments was modeled, at least in part, on aural experiences in this world, on the other hand it affected in turn the soundscape-building policies of early modern cities, serving as an archetype and a symbolic referent. The processes resulting from this interaction influenced many aspects of early modern sonic experience: for instance, the configuration of sacral spaces, devotional itineraries and ceremonies, and the preference given to some performance options and compositional techniques. In many ways music, as a privileged part of soundscape, played a key role to

substantiate the association of terrestrial cities with their celestial counterpart, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Studying this fascinating (and only apparently abstruse) phenomenon of Western sonic culture, I became acutely aware of **the continuous interplay between concrete sonic experience and the symbolic system within which it is interpreted**. Symbolic and cultural archetypes guide experience, and experience in turn provides new material for symbolic elaboration, in a spiral interaction. Understanding these processes is of paramount importance for the interpretation of many small and great things in the music of the Renaissance.

c) The third 'pillar' is meant as a countermeasure against the risk of vagueness and abstractness inherent in this kind of research. The analysts of Renaissance music have often directed their attention to aspects which are relevant mainly in the perspective of the history of composition or of musical theory, thus looking for 'hidden' compositional structures, dissecting motives in reductionist fashion, considering form only from the point of view of the composer. The main focus of what I have defined as a realistic, phenomenological approach to music analysis falls instead on **the *perceivable* aspects** of musical structures. Thus, for instance, I have formulated the concept of 'sonic styles' as a tool for analyzing late sixteenth-century vocal polyphony. To think in terms of sonic styles means to identify constellations of variables which recur with a certain regularity and in a deliberate way, and need to be studied in their interaction. Generally speaking, these constellations are sonically evident and guide the perception of form.

The global approach of this project enable us to throw new light on many different questions. In what follows, I will give three examples deriving from the case studies (to be published in forthcoming articles) and concerning:

      a) a composer and his oeuvre
      b) a non-musical figure
      c) a compositional medium

Some results from the case studies

1) A composer and his oeuvre: T.L. de Victoria

In a recent congress, I listened to a paper whose subject was a statistical mapping of dissonance treatment in Victoria's five-part music. It made me reflect. And I couldn't help thinking that many kinds of scholarly approaches to late sixteenth-century music, even though legitimate and interesting in their own right, are utterly inadequate to describe the sonic impact of this music, its perceivable form. My own approach to Victoria's music has been focused precisely on this problem. For the sake of time, I will not enter analytical details, but only try to summarize my reasearch journey and its results.

Firstly, I directed my attention to a neglected part of Victoria's compositional output, that is his polychoral music. Studying his two- and three-choir works, I noticed a remarkable interest for sonic contrasts, polar oppositions between different textures, and a clear articulation of form anticipating formal developments which were to come in the following decades. Many of his compositions are indeed far from any cliché on 'Roman' polychorality. Some of his later works feature an unprecedented combination of battle-style and polychoral medium, or a highly expressive opposition between monochoral polyphonic sections and polychoral sections.

The polychoral interaction multiplies the effects of textural, contrapuntal, and rhythmic contrasts in a particularly effective way. But **in a second phase** of my analytical work I realised that Victoria manifested the same sonic creativity also in his better-known monochoral compositions.

Even in concise and restrained compositions, consisting mainly of homorhythmic textures, such as the famous *Vere languores nostros* of 1572, Victoria uses different sonic styles. Striking contrasts are obtained through combined changes in texture, vocal orchestration, tessitura, melodic direction, rhythmic pace, declamation style, and the horizontal scale of the segments. A sonically aware analysis allows to overcome the simplistic distinction between homorhythmic and imitative or contrapuntal textures, and, as regards the form, hackneyed labels like "additive" and "through-composed", vague to the point of being useless. Adopting different sonic styles, Victoria not only obtains a clear sectionalisation, but also plays with symmetrical and asymmetrical configurations: and these strategies of articulation and differentiation, of symmetry and contrast obviously serve expressive as well as form-building purposes.

This approach has revealed Victoria's keen attention to the role of the top voice, his penchant for sonic contrast, his interest in clearly articulating form, his gift for ear-catching, pivotal gestures… Factors which are probably responsible, at least in part, for the sense of formal urgency and expressive strength so characteristic of his music. Factors which are not necessarily in line with the stereotyped view of his style.

2) A non-musical figure often cited in music historical accounts: saint Charles Borromeo

When for various reasons I turned my attention to the figure of Carlo Borromeo, I realised that, even though he is frequently cited in the musicological literature, usually in relation to a set of themes including the 'textual intelligibility' issue and the liturgical repercussions of his Church reforms, no one had tried to put these aspects into the context of his lifelong sonic experience within the soundscape of

his time. So I decided to reconstruct a 'sonic life' of Carlo Borromeo, gathering information from many different contemporary sources, as well as from the endless interdisciplinary literature on him.

I summarize some points, which question many clichés:

- His attitude towards music was rooted in the typical education of noble young men in the Italian Cinquecento, featuring varied musical experiences, from active performance to music therapy. His early biographers agree that music was congenial to him ("naturalmente grata"). And new evidence confirms that a vivid attention to liturgical music accompanied him until his last days.

- In this light, it seems clear that, after his conversion, he did not became a potential 'musicoclast'. His interventions, both when prohibiting music and when promoting its liturgical and pastoral use, rested on a solid basis of knowledge, experience, and consciousness.

- He promoted the use of spiritual songs in the Schools of Christian doctrine and in private houses and workshops. He paid musicians to sing during the evening prayer in the Chapel of the archbishop's palace, in order to stimulate devotion and to attract people, particulary young noblemen.

- In Borromeo's view, man was to be entirely consecrated to God. Thus, recalling the ancient (and biblical) precept of the *custodia oris*, he insistently recommended that especially clerics and choristers should use their voice in a proper and chaste way. If his growing austerity made him diffident of musical instruments (although he had played string and wind instruments in his youth), the voice was for him the organ of divine praise, "sacris dicata". The uses of the voice recommended for instance in his *Libretto de i ricordi* (1578) echo New Testament themes and foreshadow the soundscape of heaven.

- Saint Charles tried to control the sounds of Milan. He fought against the intrusiveness of secular sounds and noise. He meticulously regulated the use of bells. During the plague of 1575-1576, he turned the city in a monastery, resonating seven times a day with hymns and prayers – places and districts almost functioning as antiphonal choirs ("plateae aut vici quasi choros singulos efficiebant").

- Even his normative interventions on the discipline and vestments of choristers cannot be interpreted in a monodimensional fashion, but should be related to their proper symbolic context: they have to do with the archetypal identification of chorister and angel, which in turn is connected to the complex and widely influential idea of heavenly music.

3) A compositional medium: polychorality

If my point on Victoria exemplified the analytical approach of the project, and the part on Carlo Borromeo exemplified the integration of different methods, my last subject, polychorality, has to do with all the three methodological pillars mentioned above: in fact, discussing it we will be forced to move to and fro between these different dimensions.

First of all, it must be said that polychorality is a largely underestimated and understudied phenomenon. An inadequate perception of *longue durée* structures in the period 1550-1650 is at least partly responsible for this.

Thanks to some recent studies, we have strong reasons to suspect a widespread diffusion of polychoral music, even in peripheral regions of the musical geography of Europe. Unfortunately, we know precious little about what happens outside the mainstream of polychorality, but even within the

principal branches of the tradition we lack detailed accounts of the contribution and stylistic idiosyncrasies of single authors. Surely, different models of polychorality were developed, fulfilling different functions, and these models were transformed in cross-fertilization processes.

We are far from being able to determine the phenomenology of the use of polychorality in the different areas and to tell how much it depended from the different cultural spheres of influence. To what extent was the adoption of polychorality a matter of "technical fashion", and, on the other hand, to what extent was it part of a process of cultural emulation, of the effort to recreate the sonic images of, say, Venice, or Rome, or Munich, or Vienna? And how did the dynamics of international mobility, migration, and recruitment influence the whole phenomenon?

In spite of all these open questions, analytical and contextual research on late sixteenth-century polychoral music has convinced me that polychorality played a crucial role both in the history of composition and in the history of sonic experience.

The polychoral medium acted as a bridge between the polyphonic conception of the late sixteenth-century and the variegated compositional scene of the Seicento.

Besides its functionality as a tool to organize large numbers of singers and instruments playing together, the polychoral principle inspires a reconfiguration of the relationships between structure, scoring, and timbre.

Even though the melodic and contrapuntal grammar is more or less the same as in monochoral composition, there is an ontological discontinuity between polyphonic writing (even though 8-part) and polychoral writing. Writing polychoral music, composers behave differently than they otherwise would.

For instance, the basic rhetoric principle of repetition acquires a new significance and a new importance. The multiplication of repetitions in final sections – a long-lasting solution to clarify their formal role – appears to be rooted in this tendency. Incidentally, the final legitimation of sequential writing and the establishment of clearer tonal patterns have also to do with the same mechanisms of polychoral composition.

Furthermore, having at his disposal a large ensemble splitted into subgroups, the composer is encouraged to heighten the contrasts, breaking the principles of continuity typical of vocal polyphony. On the intermediate level of formal planning, this leads to an abrupter syntax between the segments. On a higher level, to the use of contrasting sections, implementing a clearer articulation of form and a more vivid sonic rendering of the text.

The interaction between the choirs often develops into fixed patterns, basic idiomatic formulas, capable of innumerable variations on different levels. In general, different factors converge to promote the use of smaller formal units, organized in more or less symmetrical structures. Phraseology becomes more plastic, and at the same time more varied and more formular, than in monochoral compositions.

Not less important is the role of polychorality as a source of new sonic possibilities. Even though the real spatialization of the performing groups cannot be taken for granted, polychorality could undoubtedly offer previously unexpected perceptive experiences. The cultural significance of its

emergence still has to be critically evaluated, and put in relation to the contemporaneous craze for echo effects and other forms of sonic illusionism.

And I conclude returning to the interaction between experience and symbolic systems: The origins of polychorality are obviously deep-rooted in technical and purely musical matters, but every technique has a spiritual underpinning. Thus I believe that the extraordinary success and dissemination of polychorality may find a partial explanation in its capacity to depict some essential aspects of heavenly music. Polychorality did not only enhance the magnificence of the musical apparatus: it maximized some of the most effective paradise-evoking aural experiences. Its 'surround' effects, antiphonal exchanges, layered superimposition and occasional *tutti* seem the best possible sonic representation of the ineffable performances of celestial choirs, the mysterious Seraphim calling *alter ad alterum* of Isaiah.

*   *   *

In conclusion, I apologize for having given, in a certain sense, three papers concentrated into one, cutting examples and explanations for the sake of time. But I wished to convey the idea that a more sonically aware, sonically oriented approach to Renaissance music can bear fruits in many different ways and on many intriguing issues. Thank you.

SCARTI

While the first phase was focused on 'the Renaissance' (with special emphasis on sixteenth-century Italy), the second phase will explore "The Soundscape of Early Modern Catholicism". Thus, it has a somehow different cultural and chronological scope, even though sharing the same methods.

– which combines cultural history and material history, phenomenological analysis and exploration of the context, insights coming from new disciplines and novel applications of long-established methods –

~~In a more general sense, this reflection helped me to appreciate more fully the special character of this period in the history of the European musical civilisation. The sixteenth century can be seen as the first climax in the "rise" of music in European culture: music becomes, in the words of the French historian Jean Delumeau, "a synonym of happiness", "the essential partner of love", and a perfect foretaste of eternal joy. And it is precisely in this period, and as a result of the interaction between experience and symbol, that long-lasting sonic models are worked out: from the association between contrapuntal texture and learned or ecclesiastical music to the angelic character of children's voice, from the Elysian properties of purely diatonic harmonies to the musical rendering of peculiar sonic elements (natural sounds, battle sounds, etc.).~~

- Also his association to St. Ambrose, which would become a topic, has a 'sonic' basis in early Borromean literature (for instance in the *Vita Caroli Borromei* by cardinal Valier).

~~(part of the decades-long experiments which ultimately led to "the orchestra")~~

~~In the same order of ideas, polychorality seems to promote a new sensibility for horizontal formal relationships: the frequency and rate of antiphonal exchanges, the respective length of each choir's contribution, the insertion of monochoral segments, all become tools to shape form.~~

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~~- leaflet promozionali~~

~~- biglietti da visita~~

~~- stampata paper~~

- mettere tutto su chiavetta

- mettere tutto su internet

~~- stampata BIO~~

~~- stampata ricevuta iscrizione~~

~~- stampata biglietti~~

~~- stampata spostamenti & help desk~~

~~- decidere sequenza spostamenti mercoledì: se non si passa da casa, avvisare~~

~~- stampata ricevuta casa & indirizzo~~

~~- I-pad e suo caricabatterie~~

~~- app per leggere pdf su Ipad~~

~~- rendere accessibile versione salvata del pdf… si può fare?~~

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