

Marier, Ted
— Polyphony ---
ADU 1840



THE
CATHOLIC
HOUR

Polyphony – Old and New

Theodore Marier and
Mother Josephine Morgan

SEPTEMBER 15, 1957

Deacidified

Polyphony - Old and New

ANNCR: This is the CATHOLIC HOUR. Today, the Catholic Hour continues its special series of five programs on MUSIC IN CATHOLIC WORSHIP. Presented by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company, these broadcasts explore the nature and purpose of Sacred Music and its role in the life of the Church.

In producing this unusual series, the CATHOLIC HOUR has the cooperation of the Pius X School of Liturgical Music of Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, in Purchase, New York. All of the music and commentary you will hear was especially recorded for this series during the recently completed summer sessions at Pius X School. The student body, consisting of priests, sisters, and laymen, devoted much time and effort to preparing these musical presentations as their contribution to the CATHOLIC HOUR's mission of communicating the treasures of the Universal Church to the American public.

In these five programs, the CATHOLIC HOUR departs from its customary uninterrupted talks to present studies in word and music which will demonstrate the importance and beauty of "Music in Catholic Worship." Today's broadcast is entitled "polyphony – Old and New." And here to introduce it is Mother Josephine Morgan of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, director of Pius X School. Mother Morgan.

MOTHER MORGAN: Last week we devoted our program to a study of Gregorian Chant and we learned something of the nature and beauty of this ancient musical form. We have seen that it is the official musical language of the Church. But there is another form of music which has been in wide use for more than three centuries, polyphony or part-singing. Today we're going to explore this branch of Sacred Music and see why it has earned such a high place in the heart of the Church. This presentation will be made by a distinguished member of our faculty, Mr. Theodore Marier.

MARIER: Thank you Mother. St. Pius X in 1903 established the norms by which we are to judge music for Catholic worship. In his letter of instruction, he said, "the qualities which all music admitted to the service of the Church

must possess are to be found in the highest degree in Gregorian Chant. These qualities are *holiness, universality and goodness of form.*" Now, in saying this, the Holy Father did not mean to exclude every form of music other than the Chant. In the same letter St. Pius says, "These qualities are possessed to an eminent degree by classic polyphony." Students of music are aware that this style of music reached its perfection in the 16th century. And further, St. Pius says, "modern music is also admitted to the Church since it, too, furnishes compositions of such excellence, sobriety, and gravity that they are in no way unworthy of liturgical functions."

Today, with the help of the students of the Pius X summer school, we are going to sample music of the 16th, 19th and 20th centuries. Performance and brief analysis will show how holiness, universality, and goodness of form are to be found in part-singing or polyphony, and how these can contribute to enrichment of the Church's worship.

To begin, let us consider a composition by Thomas de Victoria, a Spanish composer of the 16th century. The title is "O Vos Omnes". The text is taken from the liturgy of Holy Week. Singing this composition is especially appropriate since today, September 15th, the Church

celebrates the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. The text of this work places Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, mourning the death of her Divine Son. "O all ye who pass by the way," she says, "listen and see if there be any grief like my grief." Let's see how this text was interpreted by Victoria. "O Vos Omnes."

MUSIC: O VOS OMNES

MARIER: We can see that this composition measures up to the standards which the Holy Father has established for good church music. It has a holy purpose; the sentiment expressed is deeply religious. And the fact that after 300 years it still appeals and its message is still vital attests to its universality.

But what does the Holy Father mean when he talks about *goodness of form*? How can we evaluate this? In order to answer this question, we shall have to discuss some aspects of the technique of choral composition. Good form is essentially good craftsmanship. The composer, like the painter, the architect, the writer, or the poet, has to have a method for doing his work, a skill by means of which he hopes to give concrete expression to his idea. It is one thing for the composer to have an idea in his mind, and something else for him to express it, and, through this expression, to communicate his idea to others.

Now, the idea in the mind of a composer of sacred music is, obviously, the meaning and spirit of the text he's using. Presuming he has the necessary musical skill, a composer must have a sympathetic understanding of the significance of the words in order to produce a work which, by harmonious fusing of words and music, is the fullest possible expression of the idea.

This may seem like a mysterious process, but it will help us to understand how the composer adds this new dimension of music to prayer if we know a little about the tools at his disposal.

The simplest musical form which a choral composer can use is technically known as the syllabic style of writing. This simply means that all the singers sing the same syllable of the text at the same time: — not the same note of music, but the same syllable of the text. Perhaps an example would help. Listen closely as the men of our choral class here at the Pius X school sing "O Salutaris Hostia" by Pierre de la Rue.

MUSIC: O SALUTARIS HOSTIA

MARIER: You may have noticed that as the "O Salutaris" came to a close, the style of the music changed. The parts broke from the syllabic type of writing when each section of the choir took its turn at singing a brief descending motif of 5 notes, prior

to the last chord. For his closing phrase, the composer resorted to another type of writing which is called: imitation — so called because all the parts imitate each other. Imitation as a composing device was widely used in the so-called Golden Age of Sacred Choral Music. Another musical illustration will serve to highlight this phase of choral writing. We shall now take up a portion of a Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary; it was composed by one of the acknowledged writers of the 16th century — Palestrina. At the Hosanna section of the "Sanctus", the composer chooses the first four notes of the major scale — do-re-mi-fa — and spins out an entire composition on them. This musical phrase incidentally was taken from a Gregorian Chant theme. In fact, the entire Mass is based on the Gregorian Chant Mass in honor Our Lady.

Notice now the phrase

as the altos sing it:

as the basses sing it:

as the tenors sing it:

as the sopranos sing it:

Obviously they all sing the same musical idea. The point we wish to make here is, that while all the sections of the chorus sing the same tune, they do not sing it at the same time nor at the same pitch level. There is a certain amount of rhythmic and melodic independence in

the way the parts behave musically, and this gives the effect of weaving in and out and producing a musical texture that is at once varied and unified, expressing fully the words: Hosanna in the highest.
MUSIC: HOSANNA

MARIER: We have discussed in some detail the matter of independent voice lines because in this type of writing we find the chief characteristic of the choral music of the Renaissance. The word *polyphony*, which this program, is all about, comes from two Greek words that mean "many voiced." In musical parlance this means several "voice lines", such as soprano, alto, tenor and bass. In addition, it means that these voice lines have rhythmic and melodic independence. The style is therefore polyphonic. The syllabic style of the "O Salutaris" which we sang earlier is homophonic because all the voices sing the same syllables at the same time. Thus we have homophonic and polyphonic choral music.

A composer need not always work with four parts in his writing. He may seek to express the sentiment of a text with fewer or more parts. The following example is one by Josquin de Pres — a predecessor of Palestrina. It is taken from a longer motet in honor of the Blessed Sacrament: "Ave Verum Corpus". The

section we shall sing is for 2 voices — not two singers — but two voice lines. Note how at the beginning of the piece the composer has employed the device of imitation and then goes on to adorn the words with melodic figurations that communicate effectively to us the sentiment of the words: Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary.

MUSIC: AVE VERUM

MARIER: The purpose of these examples is to illustrate that music must be good art before it can have a rightful place in the worship of the Church. The prayer of the Church set to music by a sensitive composer is a beautiful offering to the throne of God. Keeping in mind the object of sacred music, we can only use the best art at our command.

Until now, we've been presenting music from the 16th century. Let's turn for a moment to the 19th century. A school of music which was important and influential during that period was the Cecilian School. One of its leading exponents was Michael Haller. His composition of "Jesu, Be Near Us" is a fine example of part-singing in English. We'd like to sing it for you now.

"Jesu, Be Near Us."

MUSIC: JESU, BE NEAR US

MARIER: This type of music, while not primarily a part of the sacred liturgy, is

approved and encouraged by the Church because of its religious purpose and its quality as a work of art. Hymns such as this can contribute a great deal to parish devotions, Holy Hours, Novenas, and so on.

And this brings us to the contemporary composer, the man who is writing today and is inspired to contribute to the music of Catholic worship. As an example of contemporary church music, we have selected the "Kyrie" from the "Mass in the Major Modes" by Father Russel Woollen of the Catholic University of America. This composition makes use of the organ, which, by the instruction of the Holy See, is admitted to the service of the Church. It requires the participation of the people, and thus it carries out the directives to assign music to the congregation in order that they, too, may participate in the services of the Church. It begins with a full statement of the principal theme of the "Kyrie". Sung by all:

MUSIC: KYRIE (phrase)

MARIER: Now I'd like the men of the class to sing the Gregorian Chant Introit of the Mass for the Feast of the Sacred Heart and sing the first phrase:

MUSIC: COGITATIONES

MARIER: You must see that Fr. Woollen's theme is the same as that of this Introit

written in the Chant. The repertory of Gregorian Chant has been an inexhaustible source of melody for the composers of every age. The difference between the contemporary composer's treatment of this melody and that of the older writer is that today the composer makes use of modern compositional techniques which reflect the living musical language of our day. Father Woollen illustrates in a striking way how the artist can shape these new materials to his own purpose to serve the Church's worship.

MUSIC: KYRIE OF THE MASS OF THE MAJOR MODES

MARIER: That was the "Kyrie" from Father Russell Woollen's "mass in the Major Modes", — a particularly good example of the contemporary composer's contribution to sacred music. The excellence of this composition confirms the fact that composers in every age do approach religious music with a deep awareness of the dignity of their task.

We hope that the examples of polyphony chosen for performance today have shown clearly that part music as well as chant is written to express with beauty and subtlety the finest shadings of man's relationship to God. It must send to the heavens on waves of sound all the praise and gratitude, hopes and petitions of all mankind. It must be music written for God.

MOTHER MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Marier. Ladies and Gentlemen, this concludes our explanation of the polyphonic music of the Church. We hope that we have contributed in some small way to your understanding and appreciation of the nature and purpose of this form of sacred music. Next week, we'll take up the subject of hymns. Perhaps you can be with us then.

ADDITIONAL COPIES

ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$1.00 EACH

ONLY FIFTY COPIES LEFT

AT THE PRESENT PRICE

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MUSIC

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D. C.

ADDITIONAL COPIES
ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$.10 EACH.

BULK LOTS MAY ALSO BE
HAD AT THE FOLLOWING RATES:

10 TO 99 COPIES.....\$.05 @
100 COPIES AND OVER..... .04 @

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC ME

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Presented by

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN