

Andrew Kirkman. *The Cultural Life of the Early Polyphonic Mass: Medieval Context to Modern Revival*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xiii + 384 pp. index. append. illus. bibl. \$99. ISBN: 978-0-521-11412-7.

Andrew Kirkman's new book on fifteenth-century polyphonic masses brings a wealth of new information and insightful interpretation to one of the central repertoires of European music. The book's central section, "The Ritual World of the Early Polyphonic Mass," provides four case studies of the intellectual, theological, and historical contexts of surviving musical compositions. These four chapters are themselves framed by an opening historiographical section on nineteenth-century musicological writing and a concluding discussion of fifteenth-century religious ritual

and its meaning. This plan allows Kirkman to work backwards from modern perceptions through historical evidence, so as to approach his goal of understanding the religious experience of which surviving musical compositions were originally a part.

The great cycles of polyphonic settings of the Mass Ordinary have long been understood to be monuments of artistic achievement. Just how long is revealed in the first section of the book, where Kirkman exposes the Hegelian framework within which these musical works were first encountered and understood. Kirkman's discussion is a valuable addition to the small but important body of scholarship on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century origins of the discipline of musicology, including Kirkman's own earlier article on Ambros (*Nineteenth Century Music* 24 [2000]), Katherine Bergeron's work on the Solesmes monks (University of California Press, 1998; not cited by Kirkman), Christopher Page's discussion of the influence of Huizinga (Oxford, 1993), and Paula Higgins's work on Josquin (*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 [2004]; not cited by Kirkman). Kirkman shows how nineteenth-century discourse on the idea of a Renaissance affected early music-history writing in fundamental ways, as well as how musical evidence was itself used to create and support that very idea.

Each of the central sections' four chapters could profitably be used as the basis for a graduate seminar. The two outer chapters, 3 and 6, survey trends in large numbers of masses, while chapters 4 and 5 each study a specific group of polyphonic masses. In chapter 3 Kirkman revisits the question of the seemingly contradictory use of secular songs as *cantus firmi* for the composition of liturgical polyphony, drawing heavily on David Rothenberg's 2004 doctoral dissertation. (Rothenberg's own book, *The Flower of Paradise: Marian Devotion and Secular Song in Medieval and Renaissance Music* will be published by Oxford University Press in 2011.) Chapter 6 discusses the addition of polyphonic music to celebrations of Mass, particularly connected with the elevation of the Host. Chapter 4 considers the widely-copied and imitated English "Caput" Mass, while chapter 5 revisits the "L'homme armé" masses, the single largest group of based on the same *cantus firmus*. In both of these chapters Kirkman engages productively with current debates as to the meanings of these much-discussed works, adding recent scholarship — including Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale, 1992) and Gordon Kipling's *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph* (Oxford, 1998) — and fifteenth-century documents (with texts included in the appendix) new to musicological discussion.

This book is essential reading for anyone concerned with the music and liturgy of fifteenth-century Europe. Kirkman's diligent and erudite scholarship is not for undergraduates, but I hope that everyone concerned with teaching them about so-called Renaissance music will engage and even grapple with Kirkman's formidable challenge to music history as still presented in textbooks. Scholarship on polyphonic masses has tended to focus on compositional practice, so Kirkman's cultural and historiographical contextualization is both welcome and necessary.

For musicologists, Kirkman provides valuable insight into the historiographical, ideological, and aesthetic support early scholarship on fifteenth-century music gave to the formation of the musical canon, particularly valuable in the current context of that canon's demise. For example, the idea of organic unity as a value in music was first discussed, by Ambros, with reference to polyphony based on preexisting melody, including *cantus firmus* masses. Fifteenth-century music may no longer be needed to explain the origins of Western music, but it would be a terrible shame if this particular baby were to be thrown away with the bathwater of a now-discredited historiographical framework. Kirkman's narration shows how the story of music history was originally told through a strikingly limited number of examples, and even as more music was discovered, the overall narrative remained unexamined.

Non-musicologists concerned with historiography of the Renaissance as well as the fifteenth century itself will find this book more opaque than it needed to be. The central section of Kirkman's book concerns music well-known to specialists without introducing or describing any of it to readers not already familiar with it. While Kirkman, in footnotes, does refer readers to general studies found elsewhere, it would not have been difficult to include the names of composers, lists of specific works, or concise descriptions to the main text. This is a shame, as Kirkman's excellent use of both historical writings and modern musicological scholarship will go far towards contextualizing musical compositions for other scholars of this period.

There are three appendixes, "Texts relating to L'homme armé," "Texts concerning secular music in Church," and "Madrigals listed in *L'Histoire de la Mapped-Monde papistique*." Some, but not all, of this material is translated into English, with no explanation given for the discrepancy.

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