

# Adrian Willaert, Master of Music at St Mark's, Venice

Adrian Willaert: Transcription and Analysis of Ave Maria for four voices

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The period 1550-1560 was a one of incomparable prosperity for Venice and her merchants. The economic boom benefited the publishing sector, bringing a rapid increase in the number of printing businesses. This reached its height at the end of 1560, when the industry numbered 50 or 60 printing presses employing about 600 people. The favourable economic situation encouraged a number of beginners to try their hand at the business.

Francesco Rampazetto was active as a printer from 1553 to his death in about 1577. He worked mainly on commission for other printers and booksellers. Like many of his colleagues he printed a great variety of books on many different subjects, from architecture to literature, and from astronomy to history and music. Most publications were in the vernacular, but he also published books in Latin, Greek and Spanish. From 1561 to 1568 he published at least thirty-two books of music and a book of music theory.

Many works he issued, such as the *First Book of Spiritual Lauds* by Giovanni Razzi (1563, Jacopo and Filippo Giunti, Florence), the *Third Book of the Muses for Four Voices* (1563, Antonio Barré), and the *Second Book of Madrigals for Five*

*Voices* by Pietro Vinci (Giovanni Comencino, Venice) confirm his status as a contract worker for individual clients and other printers. The remainder of his first editions were directly commissioned by composers or third parties. In 1566 Rampazetto, at the request of Filippo Iusberti, a cantor at St Mark's, printed Zarlino's motets for six voices. He also undertook to reprint well-known choral anthologies by famous composers of the time. One of these is the anthology entitled *Mottetti del Fiore*.

The full title of the work is *Mottetti del Fiore a Quattro voci novamente ristampati, et con somma diligentia revisti et corretti. Libro Primo. In Venetia, Appresso Francesco Rampazetto. In 4° obl. Cantus, Tenor, Altus, Bassus. In tutto opuscoli quattro.*

(*Mottetti del Fiore* for Four Voices, newly reprinted and diligently revised and corrected. Book One. In Venice, by Francesco Rampazetto. Cantus, Tenor, Altus, Bassus. In all, four volumes.)

An original copy of the work is kept at the International Music Museum and Library in Bologna. It contains the following titles (the authors' names are here quoted as they appear in the document):

In te Domine speravi ... Lerithier

Letetur omne seculum ... Lupus

Filie Jerusalem ... Archadelt

Panis quem ego dabo ... Lupus

Beati omnes ... Lerithier

Nisi Dominus ... Lerithier

Descendit angelus ... Hilaire Penet

Gloriosa uirgo ... N. Paignier

Dum aurora ... N. Paignier

Virtute magna ... Lasson

Tu es Petrus ... Gose

Domine quis habitabit ... Jo. Courtois

Benedixit Deus ... Archadelt

Aue Santissima Maria ... N. Gombert

Fuit homo ... N. Gombert

Tanto tempore ... Verdelat

Haec dies quam fecit ... Archadelt

Beati omnes ... Lupus

Sponsa Christi Cecilia ... Loiset Pieton

Quam pulchra es ... Jo. Lupi

Omnis pulchritudo domini ... Dambert

Nisi ego abiero ... Dambert

Vir inclitus ... F. De Lis

Proba me domine ... P. Manchicourt

Quem dicunt homines ... Richafort

In conuertendo dominus ... Lupus

Gabriel archangelus ... Verdelot

Pater noster ... Adrianus Wuillart (Adrian Willaert)

For the transcription the last motet was consulted. Its *secunda pars* is an Ave Maria, with a variation preceding its official classification in the year 1571 on the occasion of the battle of Lepanto. The text used by Adrian Willaert runs:

*Ave Maria, gratia plena,  
Dominus tecum,  
benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.  
Sancta Maria, Regina Coeli,  
dulcis et pia, o Mater Dei,  
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
ut cum electis te videamus.*

This motet, printed in 1564, is one of Adrian Willaert's finest works. In his language, imitation is not merely artifice, but a technique enhancing the expressiveness of words and thoughts. Naturally, the fact that Adrian Willaert lived in Venice, where the long list of dictates issuing from the Council of Trent (1545-1562) were struggling to gain acceptance, aided him in developing a style of composition unimpeded by papal interference and much influenced by the taste for typically Venetian colour.

The motet, in the first mode, Dorian, which corresponds to the Gregorian *Protus authenticus*, transposed to G, is set out in four sections which correspond to four verses making up this prayer to the Virgin. The verses are: Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus; Sancta Maria, Regina Coeli, dulcis et pia, O Mater Dei; and ora pro nobis peccatoribus, ut cum electis te videamus. These verses, and the various sections into which they are subdivided, can be easily recognised, not

only by the words which obviously distinguish each part, but also by the harmonic cadences which define them. Below is the pattern of the cadences found in the piece – the obvious predominance of G is numerically balanced by the less usual subfinalis[1], where one would expect to find more use of D.

Ave Maria	B flat
perfect-authentic tenorizans[2]	
Gratia plena I	G perfect-
authentic tenorizans	
Gratia plena II	F perfect-
authentic tenorizans	
Dominus tecum I	G plagal
Dominus tecum II	G perfect-
authentic bassizans[3]	
Benedicta tu I	F
tenorizans	
Benedicta tu II	B flat
tenorizans	
in mulieribus I	D perfect-
authentic bassizans	
in mulieribus II	G perfect-
authentic bassizans	
Et benedictus	D phrygian
tenorizans	
Fructus ventris tui Jesus I	B flat perfect-
authentic tenorizans	
Fructus ventris tui Jesus II	F perfect-authentic

bassizans

Sancta Maria I authentic tenorizans	F perfect-
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Sancta Maria II authentic tenorizans	C perfect-
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Regina coeli authentic tenorizans	F perfect-
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Dulcis et pia	D plagal
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O Mater Dei tenorizans	D phrygian
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Ora pro nobis I authentic tenorizans	F perfect-
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Ora pro nobis II	C plagal
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peccatoribus I authentic tenorizans	C perfect-
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Ut cum electis te videamus I bassizans	G perfect-authentic
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Te videamus II	G plagal
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The tenor, immediately after presenting the first melodic extract, intones with long notes the Gregorian Ave Maria, and continues to do so in other sections of the piece: thus the entire composition can almost be said to be built on the *cantus firmus*[4].

The first verse, which can be further divided into three parts (Ave Maria, gratia plena, and Dominus tecum) is imitative. The initial interval of a fourth on 'Ave' is a distinguishing feature and is repeated by almost all the other voices, at

times with a diminution in value. At the end of the section it can be noted that all parts follow, on the words 'Dominus tecum' the modulation of the rhetorical figure, *katabasis*.

In the second section, on the words 'Benedicta tu in mulieribus', Adrian Willaert gives the richest ornate counterpoint in the entire piece. Note once more, in the tenor[5], a fragment of the cantus firmus. The last part of the second section takes on a clearly rhetorical nature: the words 'Fructus ventris tui Jesus' are declaimed mainly with long and white notes easily associated with the mother's breast.

The third section contains a textual variation on the usual Ave Maria. After the statement in bicinium[6] style of the words 'Sancta Maria', the piece continues with mainly homophonic modulation, especially on the words 'Regina coeli' which thus stand out vocally.

In the last section, where there is a return to the imitative style, the same fragment of text – 'ut cum electis te videamus' – is repeated three times; the melody is distinguished by an initial interval of an ascending fifth followed by repeated notes, and by the *circulatio*[7] which seems to represent turning the gaze on the words 'te videamus'. After the perfect-authentic cadence to G, the piece ends with a characteristic plagal cadence built on the *finalis*[8] held by the tenor (manubrium).

The extraordinary artistic height reached by Adrian Willaert in this motet is owing to his command of the material and his ability to develop the relationship between text and music by means of simple technical devices shown in expression. It is interesting to observe how frequently the 'motif-word' is a development of the initial theme and how the free parts take the shape of a development in rhythmic melodic cells which often lead back to this initial theme. This notable thematic unity is used most imaginatively in a number of contrapuntal

and imitative techniques, leading to a continuing evolution of the music which is never repetitive.

Below are the part-books taken from Rampazetto's anthology, the Gregorian antiphon to Ave Maria and my transcription.

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[1] In an authentic mode, the tone below the final.

[2] in a cadence this is called: *clausula tenorizans* (probably because Gregorian melodies always end with a stepwise motion down to the *finalis* – and the tenor was originally the voice that 'holds' the *cantus firmus*, the original Gregorian melody)

[3] A jump in the bass in a cadence (in Dorian, Lydian and Mixolydian: V-I, in Phrygian there is a problem) is called *clausula bassizans*.

[4] A *cantus firmus* (held tune) is often a pre-existing melody forming the basis of a polyphonic composition. The plural is *cantus firmi*, although the corrupt form *canti firmi* (resulting from the grammatically incorrect treatment of *cantus* as a second- rather than a fourth-declension noun) can also be found. The Italian is often used instead: *canto fermo* (and the plural in Italian is *canti fermi*).

[5] In the polyphonic music of the 13th–16th centuries, 'tenor' referred to the part 'holding' the *cantus firmus*, the plainsong, or other melody on which a composition was usually built. The highest line above was termed *superius* (the modern soprano), and the third added voice was termed *contratenor*. In the mid-15th century, writing in four parts became common, and the *contratenor* part gave rise to the *contratenor altus* (the modern alto) and *contratenor bassus* (the modern bass). The term tenor gradually lost its association with a *cantus firmus*



and began to refer to the part between the alto and bass and to the corresponding vocal range.

[6] In music of the Renaissance and early Baroque eras, a *bicinium* (pl. *bicinia*) was a composition for only two parts, especially one with a pedagogical purpose.

[7] The *circulatio* (*circulo*, *circolo*) is formed by positioning two opposite (rising and falling: *intendens* and *remittens*) *circuli mezz*i adjacent to each other in such a way that, were the two ‘half-circles’ to be superimposed, a circle of notes would result. The figure is defined both as a text-explanatory musical-rhetorical figure as well as a simple ornament (*figura simplex*, *Manier*)

[8] The musical modes delineate the *finalis*, or main note, with regard to two ranges: the authentic, which lies primarily above the main note, and the plagal, which dips significantly below it. In both cases, the *finalis* is usually the pitch that literally finalizes the song on the last note; the first note may or may not be the same as the *finalis*.

(Click here to download the full score)



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