

PART FOUR

THE SENSES CONTESTED

THE SENSE OF HEARING POLITICIZED:
LITURGICAL POLYPHONY AND POLITICAL AMBITION
IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY FLORENCE*

Klaus Pietschmann

At first glance the presence of art music in the Roman liturgy seems to be as self-evident as that of precious artefacts in Christian churches. As a matter of fact, however, just as various iconoclasms radically questioned the often overwhelming presence of art in places of worship, the character and function of music during the rites was also an ardently discussed topic throughout the history of Christianity. The *longue durée* of this issue is reflected in the rather limited number of pro and contra arguments that governed such discussions over the centuries. On the one hand, the supporters of an elaborate and artistic musical practice, which involved not only the human voice but also various kinds of instruments, referred mainly to the invitation of Psalm 150 to praise the Lord 'with the sounding of the trumpet' and 'with the harp and lyre'. The idea of musical praise of God reached its climax in mystical views of the Mass. During the ceremony, the union of the Church triumphant and militant culminates in the *Sanctus*, when heaven seems to amalgamate with the church interior, and when the singing of the faithful becomes one with the eternal worship of the angels. This explains why the most elaborate forms of music should be applied to such a noble purpose. On the other hand, the critics of refined polyphonic church music underlined the role of singing as a means to convey religious messages, and hence the importance of the intelligibility of the words. This function was furthered especially in traditional chant, which had allegedly been introduced by the Church fathers Gregory and Ambrose. Their authority sanctioned the liturgical role of chant and thus became an additional argument against the introduction of other forms

* This study arose in part out of research made possible by a Deborah Loeb Brice Fellowship granted by the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Villa I Tatti, in autumn 2008 and spring 2009. I would like to record my gratitude to Joseph Connors and the whole community of fellows for the highly stimulating discussions and advice during these months.

of music into the Roman rite.¹ Of course, the interests behind these arguments changed over the centuries. In fact, in any given context the shape of church music always tends to reflect the prevailing ecclesiastical and representational politics. For example, the lavishly ornamented early Parisian organum is clearly related to the sacralization of French kingship in the thirteenth century, and much later Mozart's sober, brief orchestral masses for Salzburg mirror the enlightened conception of the rule of Emperor Joseph II.

At the same time, this long-standing debate about church music was clearly subject to changing attitudes towards audible forms of embellishment of the holy Mass. Therefore the nature of the arguments used in different historical contexts may reveal crucial information about the role attributed to the sense of hearing in religious communities under certain local, social or ideological circumstances.² Fifteenth-century Florence provides one of the more famous examples in music history of a highly politicized debate on church music, and a remarkable emphasis on the role of the senses in the liturgy.³ Within this debate, the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola became one of the most fervent detractors of polyphonic liturgical music. In his Florentine sermon cycles of the 1490s he took up the subject of polyphony on various occasions, for example on 5 March 1496:

¹ On the role of music in Christian worship see for example McKinnon J., "Christian Antiquity", in idem (ed.), *Antiquity and the Middle Ages: From Ancient Greece to the 15th Century*, Man & Music 1 (Houndmills – London: 1990) 88–119; Fuhrmann W., *Herz und Stimme: Innerlichkeit, Affekt und Gesang im Mittelalter* (Kassel: 2004); Hammerstein R., *Die Musik der Engel: Untersuchungen zur Musikanschauung des Mittelalters* (Bern – Munich: 1962); Fellerer K.G., *Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik*, 2 vols. (Kassel: 1972). On the critical voices in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see especially Dalglish W., "The Origin of the Hocket", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 31 (1978) 3–20; Wegman R.C., *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: 2008); Pietschmann K., *Kirchenmusik zwischen Tradition und Reform: Die päpstliche Kapelle und ihr Repertoire unter Papst Paul III. (1534–1549)*, *Capellae Apostolicae sextinaeque collectanea acta monumenta* 11 (Vatican City: 2007).

² Renaissance conceptions of the sense of hearing and their impact on the history of music have so far not been broadly investigated in musicological research. See for example Wegman R.C. (ed.), *Music as Heard: Listeners and Listening in Late-Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1300–1600)*, special issue of *The Musical Quarterly* 82 (1998) 427–691; Blackburn B.J., "For Whom Do the Singers Sing?", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 593–609; Dean J., "Listening to Sacred Polyphony c. 1500", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 611–636; Knighton T., "Spaces and Contexts for Listening in 15th-Century Castile: The Case of the Constable's Palace in Jaén", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 661–677.

³ On the critiques in fifteenth-century Florence see especially Macey P., *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* (Oxford: 1998) and Wegman, *Crisis of Music* 25–59 and passim.

God says: 'Take away your beautiful *canti figurati*'. These *signori* have chapels of singers who appear to be in a regular uproar (as the prophet says here), because there stands a singer with a big voice who appears to be a calf and the others cry out around him like dogs, and one cannot make out a word they are saying. Give up these *canti figurati*, and sing the plainchant ordained by the Church.⁴

Savonarola distinguishes between two practices of liturgical singing: on the one hand, the *canto figurato*, which means polyphonic music of high artistic standard; and on the other, the *canto fermo*, which refers to traditional Gregorian chant. His attacks were directed against the first sort, i.e. the musical practice that was favoured in many monasteries and by the political elites of the city because of its fine sonoric quality – a quality that was harshly condemned by the friar.⁵ In a broader discussion of religion and the senses in Renaissance Europe, this case seems especially remarkable because it reveals the enormous potential of a sense-based symbology for strategies of representation of political power. While the arguments of the critics of liturgical polyphony seem to be fairly consistent and have been studied various times, the question remains, however, on what grounds liturgical polyphony was held in such high esteem by the leading classes in spite of the objections raised against it. Musicological research has usually tended to accept the rich heritage of Renaissance church music as the logical result of an organic evolution, while neglecting the underlying intellectual and spiritual motivations.

The complex discourse and symbology behind the musical enrichment of the liturgy in the fifteenth century are the main subjects of the present study. Hitherto unconsidered theological writings on the quality and transformation of the senses in paradise, by authors such as Bartolomeo Rimberty and Celso Maffei, offer a new perspective on the debates about, and the actual role of, polyphonic music in liturgical worship. The idea of a close relationship between the saints' abilities to sing and their position in the celestial hierarchy clearly mirrors the efforts of many European

⁴ 'Dice Dio: lieva via quelli tuoi belli canti figurati. Egli hanno questi signori le cappelle de' cantori che bene pare proprio uno tumulto (come dice qui el profeta), perché vi sta là un cantore con una voce grossa che pare un vitello e li altri gli ridono attorno come cani e non s'intende cosa che dichino. Lasciate andare e' canti figurati, e cantate e' canti fermi ordinati dalla Chiesa'. Savonarola G., *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. P. Ghiglieri, 3 vols. (Rome: 1971), vol. II, 23; translation: Macey, *Bonfire Songs* 97f.

⁵ See for an overview D'Accone F.A., 'Sacred Music in Florence in Savonarola's Time', in Garfagnini G.C. (ed.), *Una città e il suo profeta: Firenze di fronte al Savonarola* (Florence: 2001) 311–354.

courts and religious institutions to have their liturgies enriched by lavishly composed and exquisitely sung polyphonic compositions instead of sober and ascetic Gregorian chant. The criticisms proclaimed by Girolamo Savonarola show his deep understanding of the political implications of this connection.

The first part of this contribution briefly describes the situation of church music in fifteenth-century Florence and characterizes the criticisms of polyphony among prominent Florentine Dominicans, starting with Giovanni de Caroli, whose views will be compared with Savonarola's argumentation. In the second part these positions are confronted with other Dominican authors, especially Archbishop Antoninus and his contemporary Bartolomeo de Rimbartini. I will then conclude by highlighting a contemporary of Savonarola, Celso Maffei, whose writings on the glorification of the senses in paradise offer the final key to an understanding of the political overtones of the Florentine debate about church music.

In the 1430s the guild of the cloth finishers and merchants in foreign cloth (*Arte di Calimala*) and the woolmakers' guild (*Arte della Lana*) started to finance a choir with prominent musicians to perform in the major Florentine churches, especially the cathedral, the baptistery and SS. Annunziata.⁶ The decision to establish these Cantori di San Giovanni – as the choir was usually called – was probably influenced by the about ten-year stay in the city of Eugene IV, who employed one of the foremost musical chapels of the time. This is the background of the famous motet *Nuper rosarum flores*, composed for the consecration of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1436 by the papal singer Guillaume Dufay, the eminent Franco-Flemish musician held in the highest artistic esteem all over Europe. Giannozzo Manetti's *Oratio [...] de [...] pompis in consecratione basilicae Florentinae habitis* gives an idea of the way in which a contemporary perceived this music:

Indeed, at the elevation of the consecrated host the temple resounded throughout with the sounds of harmonious symphonies [of voices] as well as the concords of diverse instruments, so that it seemed not without reason that the angels and the sounds and singing of divine paradise had been sent from heaven to us on earth to insinuate into our ears a certain incredible divine sweetness.⁷

⁶ D'Accone F.A., "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the 15th Century", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961) 307–358.

⁷ 'In cuius quidem sacratissimi corporis elevatione tantis armoniarum symphoniis / tantis insuper diversorum instrumentorum consonationibus omnia basilicae loca reso-

This account should not be taken too literally – a mere ten papal singers would not have been able to cause the described effect in a space as enormous as that formed by the intersection of the Florentine cathedral with Brunelleschi's just finished cupola – but the impression of 'divine sweetness' was surely intended by Dufay and probably felt by those who were close enough to hear something of the music. Of special interest is the sophisticated structure of Dufay's motet. To mention only its most striking feature, the four sections reflect in their rhythmical ratios the proportions of the temple of Solomon, which was also the ideal model for the cathedral.⁸ The 'divine' effect, then, was not only based on a pleasant sonority but also, and much more, on a refined, meaningful composition, in which the articulation of the words admittedly played a secondary role. Obviously the intention was to create a celestial soundscape that would contribute to the stylization of Florence as a city favoured by God. On the other hand, the plainchant propagated by Savonarola was not absent from this composition: the beginning of the Introitus of the mass *In dedicatione ecclesiae* – 'Terribilis est locus iste' – is repeatedly intoned by two voices in long note values. This quotation amidst the contrapuntal framework is not easy to identify, and indeed this was by no means the kind of chant practice that Savonarola intended.

The fundamental difference between the two ways of performing a religious text should by now be clear. In the first case it is the harmony, the brilliance of the voices, the authority of a certain composer that dominates the impression, while in the second the whole concentration is directed towards the words, and these are assumed to have an effect of their own even if the listener is not able to understand the meaning of the Latin text.

Frank D'Accone and others have convincingly argued that the driving force behind the musical initiatives of the guilds were the Medici. The family acted in evident competition with the Italian courts, which already earlier in the fifteenth century had started to establish similar

nabant: ut angelici ac prorsus divini paradisi sonitus cantusque demissi caelitus ad nos in terris divinum nescio quid ob incredibilem suavitatem quandam in aures nostras insur-rare non inmerito viderentur'. Žak S., "Der Quellenwert von Giannozzo Manettis Oratio über die Domweihe von Florenz 1436 für die Musikgeschichte", *Die Musikforschung* 40 (1987) 2–32, at 14.

⁸ On Dufay's motet see especially Wright C., "Dufay's Nuper rosarum flores, King Solomon's Temple, and the Veneration of the Virgin", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47 (1994) 395–441.

musical institutions.⁹ Statements like Savonarola's therefore may have been affected not only by a general scepticism of Church reform circles towards liturgical polyphony, but also by the political disaffection of the republican party, which seems to have rejected sacred polyphony as an oligarchic symbol.

About thirty years before Savonarola started to attack this musical practice the Dominican friar Giovanni Caroli, a prominent figure at Santa Maria Novella, became ardently engaged in the reform of his order.¹⁰ Occasionally he came into conflict with his superiors, and in the early 1460s he was even exiled to Lucca. After his return, however, he soon consolidated his position in Florence, taught at the Studio, and finally became prior of Santa Maria Novella in 1479. Even though he agreed with Savonarola in his judgements on the moral decay of his times, he became a radical opponent of the Frate, mainly because he rejected his prophetic messages. Among his writings are the *Vitae fratrum Beatae Mariae Novellae*, which he finished by about 1480. These biographies present seven fourteenth-century members of the convent and depict them as impeccable witnesses of a morally upright past. In the dedicatory letters to contemporary Florentines, which preface each of the biographies, these pictures are contrasted with complaints about the decadence of the present times. One of these letters, written in 1479 and addressed to a certain Roberto Boninsegni, harshly attacks current musical practices. Caroli criticizes the popular singing of the confraternities but admits that perhaps it might be praised to some extent 'if they did those things with good integrity and faith, and not for the pride of this world'.¹¹ By contrast, he condemns without any exception 'that which can be abundantly observed in many men of our city at the enormous gathering of the crowds, where they are accustomed to singing the prophetic psalms or the sacred hymns with figured (as they say) harmonies and consonances, flattering the ears of men, and appealing to the multitude with an empty food'.¹² He continues by underlining

⁹ D'Accone, "Singers of San Giovanni" 309.

¹⁰ On Caroli see especially Camporeale S.I., "Giovanni Caroli e le *Vitae Fratrum S.M. Novellae*: Umanesimo e crisi religiosa (1460–1480)", *Memorie Domenicane* n.s. 12 (1981) 141–267.

¹¹ '[...] si bona facerent integritate ac fide nec pro seculi fastu'. Quoted from Wegman R.C., *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: 2008) 26. On the musical practice of Florentine confraternities see Macey, *Bonfire Songs* and Wilson B., *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford: 1992).

¹² '[...] id quod in nonnullis nostrae civitatis hominibus abunde observari ingenti multorum concursu videmus, ubi figuratis (ut aiunt) melodiis et consonantiis vel propheticos

the qualities of the devout, dignified and sanctioned chant which should be practised 'lest our mind should wander through pride and levity, rather than to flow and glide away, in that figured, frivolous, and feeble song'. The central quality of chant consists in its capacity to transmit the holy words of the liturgy, which as a consequence 'acquire a certain invisible power to draw in the souls of men and to inflame them with divine love'.¹³ In other words, a spiritual quality is attributed to the text alone, while music should act only as a mediator. Any direct sensorial impact of music, however, distracts the mind and leads the listener astray.

These words are shaped by the 'classic' arguments against polyphony mentioned above. They serve Caroli's purpose – of playing the present off against the glorious past – very well. As noted, liturgical polyphony was a quite recent phenomenon in Florence. Caroli was a close witness of this rising trend: he entered the community of Santa Maria Novella in 1442, that is one year before Eugene IV and his court left the convent. In the 1470s Lorenzo de' Medici had started to enlarge systematically the Cantori di San Giovanni, and in 1478 (only one year before Caroli wrote his verdict) the overseers of the cathedral had installed their own choir, obviously to compete with the well-established group kept by the Medici.¹⁴ So Caroli's critique probably reflects this recent development¹⁵ and must be seen in the context of his reform efforts; the latter were probably not informed by political motives.

About fifteen years later Girolamo Savonarola picked up Caroli's arguments and articulated them in different ways. It is not known whether he knew the *Vitae fratrum*, but (as Rob Wegman has recently shown) these kinds of criticism became more and more diffused all over Europe in the last decades of the fifteenth century.¹⁶ Savonarola first arrived at San Marco in 1482 and soon became the most fervent, eloquent critic of the moral depression of Florence and the Church in general. After the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492 Savonarola contributed to the destabilisation of Medici rule and the establishment of a prophetic government.

psalmos vel divinos hymnos decantare consuescunt: auribus hominum blandientes et multitudinem inani illo allicientes cibo'. Quoted from Wegman, *Crisis of Music* 26.

¹³ '[...] vim quamdam invisibilem optinent hominum animos alliciendi ac divinis amoribus inflammandi'. Quoted from Wegman, *Crisis of Music* 27.

¹⁴ D'Accone, "Singers of San Giovanni" 327–328.

¹⁵ This view is underlined by the absence of any references to music in Caroli's otherwise equally pessimistic *Liber dierum lucensium* written about fifteen years earlier.

¹⁶ Wegman, *Crisis of Music*.

Interestingly, it was not until this radicalization that he broached the issue of church music.¹⁷

Like Caroli, Savonarola stigmatized especially the sensuous quality of music, which he saw as a distraction of the mind. Instead he advocated the reintroduction of traditional chant:

The praises [*laude*] and divine offices of the Church were created so that God may always be praised. But today we have converted these divine praises into something secular, with music and songs that delight our sense and ear but not our spirit; and this is not to the honour of God. Even though these songs may be sweet to the ears, nevertheless they do not restrain the soul, nor do they contain it within the enjoyment of divine things, and thus it is necessary to return to that original simplicity. And they should say the offices without so much singing, but only with devotion and with little inflection of the voice and with simplicity.¹⁸

This point, which recurs – in several variants – also in other sermons,¹⁹ converges perfectly with the aforementioned criticisms. But then Savonarola continues: ‘I tell you that these songs of yours today have been invented by ambition and avarice’.²⁰ This conclusion, at first glance, does not seem logical. Surely Savonarola could argue that the engagement of highly paid prominent musicians flowed from the ambitions of the leading classes in Florence; and, as was evident in the example cited at the beginning, he explicitly made this point. Even more emphatically he mentioned it in another context:

The tyrant sometimes maintains in church, not for the honour of God but for his own pleasure, inebriated singers who – their bellies filled with plenty of wine – come to sing the Mass to Christ; and then he pays them with funds from the commune.²¹

¹⁷ Perhaps the reason was his respect for Lorenzo’s well-known musical affections, but even during his long activity in Ferrara he did not comment on the musical practices of the court chapel, which was among the most famous in Europe.

¹⁸ ‘Acciò che Dio sia sempre laudato, sono poste le laude e gli officii divini nella Chiesa. Ma noi oggidì abbiamo convertite queste laude divine in cose secolari e in musiche e canti che delectino el senso e l’orecchio e non lo spirito; e questo non è onore di Dio; e benchè questi canti siano dolci agli orecchi, *tamen* non infrenano l’anima, nè la tengano infrenata al gusto delle cose divine, e però sarebbe di bisogno tornare a quella prima semplicità e che si dicessino gli officii senza tanti cantamenti, ma solo con devozione e con poca flessione di voce e semplicemente’, Savonarola G., *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, ed. L. Firpo (Rome: 1965) 115; translation: Macey, *Bonfire Songs* 93.

¹⁹ An overview is given in Macey, *Bonfire Songs* 91–98.

²⁰ ‘Io ti dico che questi vostri canti d’oggi sono stati trovati da ambizione e avarizia’, Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo* 115; translation: Macey, *Bonfire Songs* 93.

²¹ ‘*Praeterea* il tiranno tiene nelle chiese alcuna volta, non per onore di Dio ma per suo piacere, cantori imbriaconi che, come sono ben pieni di vino, vanno a cantare la messa a

These arguments are easily applicable to the costly maintenance of the singers, but they do not seem to apply to the presumed *avarizia* and *ambitione* which Savonarola attributes to the practice of polyphony itself. So on what grounds did Savonarola stigmatize the sheer practice of polyphony not only as frivolous, but also as avaritious and ambitious?

Before answering this question it should be emphasized that in their views of music Savonarola and Caroli were rather isolated within their order. Other Florentine Dominican writers of the previous decades either did not touch on the topic of music at all or showed a rather benevolent attitude. To the first group belonged friars like Hieronymus Iohannis de Florentia from Santa Maria Novella, who was active in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, and Simone de Berti from San Marco, who later passed to Santa Maria Novella and was a direct contemporary of Giovanni Caroli. Their sermons, which are preserved in a handful of mostly Florentine sources, condemn many vices of their Florentine compatriots, like luxury, sodomy, and political ambition, but they do not make any mention of music.²²

Other Dominican authors explicitly accepted liturgical polyphony. The most prominent of them, the Florentine archbishop Antonino Pierozzi (1389–1459), in his *Summa Moralis* permits polyphonic music (he calls it *biscantus*), although he could not identify a founding authority and was critical of its sensuous appeal:

Chant has been instituted in the divine offices by holy doctors such as Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, and others. I do not know who was the first to introduce *biscantus* into the ecclesiastical offices: it seems that it serves the titillation of the ears rather than devotion, although a pious mind may reap profit even from hearing this [music]. However, those who persist in such practices should see to it that 'the right life not be neglected while the alluring voice is sought after, and that he will not anger God while he pleases the people with his singing', as St. Gregory says.²³

Cristo, e pagali delli danari del commune'. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos* 222; translation: Macey, *Bonfire Songs* 97.

²² Simone Berti's sermons are preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS J. 4. 10; Hieronymus Iohannis de Florentia's *Quadragesimale Rotimata* in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS B. 8. 1514, fols. 1–112.

²³ 'Et cantus quidem firmus in divinis officiis a sanctis doctoribus institutus est ut Gregorio magno et Ambrosio et aliis. Biscantus autem in officiis ecclesiasticis quis adinvenit ignoro. Pruritui aurium videtur magis deservire quam devotioni, quamvis pia mens etiam in his fructum referat audiendo. Qui tamen huic operi insistent, videant ne dum blanda vox queritur congrua vita negligatur et deum irritet contra se dum populum delectat, ut ait Gregorius'. Antoninus, *Summa*, Pars Tertia, Lib. III Tit. 13 Cap. IV § IX; translation: Wegman, *Crisis of Music* 18.

Although Antoninus shares Savonarola's criticism and characterizes polyphony as an outward sensory attraction, nevertheless he is distinct from him by not condemning the place of polyphony in liturgical worship. Even less reserved appears to be Bartolomeo de Rimbertyni, a direct contemporary of Pierozzi.²⁴ After his profession in Santa Maria Novella in 1417 he made a brilliant career: he became bishop of Cortona in 1439 and subsequently undertook various papal missions to Greece and Scandinavia, before he died in 1466 in the Florentine convent of San Marco. In his hitherto largely unstudied *Tractatus de glorificatione sensuum in paradiso* Rimbertyni discusses the properties of the five senses as experienced by the blessed in paradise. The text stands in a long tradition, which only intensified during the Renaissance, especially in the context of a new humanist aristotelianism. Here I will focus only on one crucial element that Rimbertyni contributes to our question. One section of the treatise considers the 'septiformis reformatio audibilis in patria', the seven-fold reformation of the sense of hearing in paradise. These 'reformations' concern, for example, the capacity of hearing, speaking and singing, which in heaven is free of any earthly constraint. Most interesting for our purposes is the sixth reformation, which has to do with the 'consonantia armonica'. After citing various authorities who attest to the musical capacities of the saints and biblical figures like King David, Rimbertyni draws the following conclusion:

Therefore the *beati* are more skilled than Pythagoras, Boethius and all musicians in applying consonances, breaking up notes into small values, singing coloraturas, and so forth. Therefore, given the agility of the bodies of the blessed, which will make their tongues and organs voluble; given the ideal disposition of their organs; given their perfect knowledge of the musical art; and given their great and most intense desire to praise God and inversely to implore him – who then has any doubt that they produce the sweetest harmony there?²⁵

The choice of words clearly suggests that Rimbertyni's *beati* sing in polyphony. Of course it is true that his text describes an idealized situation in

²⁴ Cf. Kaeppli T., "Bartholomaeus Lapaccius de Rimbertynis 1404–1466", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 9 (1939) 86–127.

²⁵ 'Unde [beati] scient melius quam Pictagoras, Boetius, et omnes musici consonantias, fracturas vocum et coloraturas, et ista omnia. Unde data agilitate corporum beatorum que facit linguam et organa expedita; et data organorum optima dispositione; et data perfecta scientia artis musicæ; et dato amore magno et intensissimo deum laudandi et se invicem exorandi: quis dubitet armoniam ibi esse dulcissimam'. Rimbertynus, *De deliciis sensibilibus*, fol. 33r.

the hereafter, but the implications of this vision for the here and now are obvious. If the *beati* praise and implore God with consonances and polyphonic singing, this may be done also by human beings during their liturgical rites, insofar as the latter represent the closest earthly approximation of heaven, and it seems clear that this concept is strongly related to the long tradition of spiritual practices which tended – in the words of Peter of Ailly – ‘to reach already in this life the pleasures of the eternal rewards in an experiential way, and to taste their sweetness with delight’.²⁶

Rimbertini’s text was known in San Marco, since one of its more prominent members in the second half of the fifteenth century, Leonardo di Ser Uberti, copied it for the library.²⁷ Later it appeared also in two printed editions in Venice and Paris, while Antoninus’ *Summa Moralis* was published even more frequently and diffused all over Europe. Hence it becomes clear that Savonarola stood quite alone in Florence and in his order with his harsh condemnation of polyphonic music, based on sensory arguments; and no doubt he was aware of it.

This isolation probably led him to the additional accusation we have already mentioned, namely that church polyphony was avaritious and ambitious. It was a new charge, which no one had brought up in the earlier discussions about church music. As noted above, it is difficult to understand how Savonarola could associate *avaritia* and *ambitio* with the practice of polyphonic singing, beyond their connection to the maintenance of an expensive choir. A possible explanation for this second line of argument is suggested by another sermon, where he links the celestial hierarchy to the political situation in the city. Addressing Florence allegorically he says:

I have told you that citizens should not try to be the first or superior to the others, but rather stay quiet, everybody in his place and rank, like – as I told you – the angels and the saints in heaven, who stand in the places given them by God, without going beyond. By imitating them you would be a well-organized city similar to heaven.²⁸

²⁶ ‘[...] divinas aeternorum praemiorum delectationes jam quodammodo experimentaliter attingere et eorum suavitatem delectabiliter sapere’. Quoted from Largier N., “Inner Senses – Outer Senses: The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism”, in Jaeger C.S. – Kasten I. (eds.), *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter*, Trends in Medieval Philology 1 (Berlin-New York: 2003) 3–15, at 8; see also Imorde J., *Affektübertragung* (Berlin: 2004) 59–78.

²⁷ Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS J.7.46.

²⁸ ‘Hotti detto che nessuno cittadino debbi cercare d’esser primo nè superiore agli altri, ma stare quieto, ognuno al grado e termine suo, come t’ho detto qui di sopra che stanno

The first step to achieve this reformed order should regard the restoration of the ecclesiastical rites and particularly the abolition of polyphonic music:

But first of all you should take care that the city becomes sanctified and the liturgy blameless, so you should take away all superfluity and the *canti figurati*, which are full of lasciviousness, and everything should be done with simplicity and devotion.²⁹

Savonarola assumes that there exists a direct relationship between purified, devout liturgical worship (without polyphony) and a well-ordered civic community reflecting the celestial hierarchy. This nexus is crucial and seems to relate directly to another element of the discourse on the senses in paradise. As I mentioned before, the Dominican Rimbertyni attributes to the blessed the capacity of singing perfectly in the most elaborate polyphony conceivable. Some decades later, contemporaneously to Savonarola's statements, the regular canon of San Giovanni in Laterano Celso Maffei, who belonged to the wider Medicean intellectual orbit, goes even a step further.³⁰ In his *Delitiosa explicatio de sensibilibus deliciis paradisi* ('Delightful explanation of the sensuous pleasures of paradise') he affirms like Rimbertyni:

It must be noted that the saints in the future state have a better understanding of the proportions of voices and sounds with respect to the musical art than anybody in this world. Similarly they can execute the breaking of voices most perfectly and have more capable voices than other musicians.³¹

But then he continues by assuming that this capacity is differentiated within the celestial hierarchy:

By a rough estimate, the sweetness of the voices and sounds that will resound in the glory [of heaven] will exceed all sweetness of this life about

gli angeli e li beati in Paradiso, ciascuno a' termini suoi che Dio gli ha dati, e non cercano più in là; a questo modo saresti città ordinata come la celeste'. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Aggeo* 416–417.

²⁹ 'E però tu doveresti in prima provvedere che nella città tua fusse santo e buono el culto divino e levar via le superfluità e li canti figurati, che sono pieni di lascivia, e che ogni cosa fusse con semplicità e devozione'. Ibid. 417.

³⁰ On Celso Maffei see Widlocher N., *La Congregazione dei canonici regolari lateranensi: Periodo di formazione (1402–1483)* (Gubbio: 1929); McDannell C. – Lang B., *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: 2001).

³¹ 'Tenendum est quod sancti in futuro statu melius scient proportiones vocum et sonorum secundum artem musicae quam aliquis in hoc mundo. Similiter scient fractiones vocum optime peragere et habebunt organa aptiora quam aliqui musici'. Maffei, *Delitiosam explicationem*, no foliation.

five hundred times. But in some saints it will be one hundred times only; in some others one thousand times; in yet others more than a thousand times; and so forth. [...] Inasmuch as one saint will rank higher than another in his sense of hearing, the sweetness of the audible object [he produces] will be proportionately greater, just as it will be smaller in its effect – that is, in the pleasure it provokes – in a less deserving saint.³²

In other words, the celestial hierarchy is mirrored in the gradations of sensory expression and experience of the saints. Similar to Rimberty's conception, Maffei's view can easily be projected onto the Christian liturgy. In this case, however, not only is the use of polyphony legitimized by analogy, but its sensory effects are tied to the hierarchy of merit of those who produce, appreciate and foster these exquisite sounds. Consequently, the quality of church music becomes a direct indicator of the proximity to God. Read against this background, Giannozzo Manetti's description of the consecration of Santa Maria del Fiore suggests a similar ideology, according to which the sonorous quality of the music performed at that occasion, and its effect on the audience, become evidence that Medicean Florence is a city of the elect. Likewise, having an outstanding group of singers was not a mere status symbol to compete outwardly with the other Italian courts, but an audible proof of the often claimed equality or even superiority of the Medici to these courts. This equality was to become a political reality only in the 1530s, but the claim was articulated long before in various ways. Arguments like those of Maffei (and probably other writers still to be identified) suggest the context in which we should explain Medici efforts at creating celestial soundscapes in the churches of Florence.

In my hypothesis it was especially the implied link between the sensuous quality of church music and the celestial hierarchy that infuriated Savonarola and led him to attack liturgical polyphony so ardently. The sensuous quality in itself was not the crucial point, because, as St. Antoninus had put it, 'a pious mind may profit even from hearing this music'. The point was rather about what people had made out of it: based on spurious theological arguments they constructed a direct link between the sensations in paradise and an outstanding spiritual and political rank

³² 'Suavitas vocum et sonorum, quae erit in gloria, excedet secundum grossam estimationem saltem quinquagesies omnem suavitatem cantus huius vitae. Sed in quibusdam sanctis erit centies tanta. Et in quibusdam milesies. Et in aliquibus plusque milesies tanta etc. [...] Quia ergo unus sanctus secundum auditum magis meruit quam alter ideo secundum hoc suavitas obiecti audibilis erit in ordine ad ipsum maior: Et minor in alio qui minus meruit secundum effectum scilicet delectationis'. Ibid.

on earth – a link mirrored by a musical practice that claimed to echo the sensuous effects reserved to the *beati* in paradise and which at the same time was condemned by church reformers.

On these grounds it becomes clear how Savonarola could characterize polyphony as avaritious and ambitious. Since the early-fifteenth century the concepts of *avaritia* – traditionally among the cardinal sins – and *ambitio* had been converted by authors like Poggio Bracciolini and Lorenzo Ridolfi into positive qualities and indispensable principles of public prosperity and welfare.³³ This view was shared by the majority of the Florentine political elite: it endorsed the conviction of the above-mentioned hierarchical rank of Florence as a city favoured by God. Needless to say, Savonarola, based on biblical arguments, rejected these views in the same manner as he refuted the ceremonial consequences drawn from them. In his eyes the political motivation of liturgical polyphony was closely connected with the abominable perversion of a cardinal sin into a well-respected economic virtue.

Savonarola succeeded to a certain extent in reforming the musical practices in Florence. After Lorenzo's death Piero de' Medici soon decided to dismiss the Cantori di San Giovanni. But this 'purification' of the rites did not last very long. Shortly after the friar's execution the choir was re-established. Apart from all political presumption, at the turn of the sixteenth century polyphonic church music had become a representational requisite that a self-confident political centre could no longer do without. Nevertheless other reformers, like Calvin and Zwingli, came to question artistic church music on similar grounds as Savonarola had done, and it was only after the controversial debates during the Council of Trent that its position in the Roman Church became permanently stable.

³³ On Poggio Bracciolini's *De avaritia* (1428) see Proulx Lang A., *Poggio Bracciolini's De Avaritia: A Study in Fifteenth Century Florentine Attitudes Toward Avarice and Usury* (MA Thesis Univ. Montreal: 1973); on Lorenzo Ridolfi's *Tractatus de usuris* (1402–1404) see Armstrong L., *Usury and Public Debt in Early Renaissance Florence: Lorenzo Ridolfi on the Monte Comune* (Toronto: 2003).

Selective Bibliography

- ARMSTRONG L., *Usury and Public Debt in Early Renaissance Florence: Lorenzo Ridolfi on the Monte Comune* (Toronto: 2003).
- BLACKBURN B.J., "For Whom Do the Singers Sing?", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 593–609.
- CAMPOREALE S.I., "Giovanni Caroli e le *Vitae Fratrum S.M. Novellae*: Umanesimo e crisi religiosa (1460–1480)", *Memorie Domenicane* n.s. 12 (1981) 141–267.
- D'ACCONTE F.A., "Sacred Music in Florence in Savonarola's Time", in Garfagnini G.C. (ed.), *Una città e il suo profeta: Firenze di fronte al Savonarola* (Florence: 2001) 311–354.
- D'ACCONTE F.A., "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the 15th Century", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961) 307–358.
- DALGLISH W., "The Origin of the Hocket", *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 31 (1978) 3–20.
- DEAN J., "Listening to Sacred Polyphony c. 1500", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 611–636.
- ELDERS W., *Symbolic Scores: Studies in the Music of the Renaissance* (Leiden: 1994).
- FELLERER K.G., *Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik*, 2 vols. (Kassel: 1972).
- FUHRMANN W., *Herz und Stimme: Innerlichkeit, Affekt und Gesang im Mittelalter* (Kassel etc. 2004).
- HAMMERSTEIN R., *Die Musik der Engel: Untersuchungen zur Musikanschauung des Mittelalters* (Bern – Munich: 1962).
- IMORDE J., *Affektübertragung* (Berlin: 2004).
- KAEPPEL T., "Bartholomaeus Lapaccius de Rimbertainis 1404–1466", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 9 (1939) 86–127.
- KNIGHTON T., "Spaces and Contexts for Listening in 15th-century Castile: The Case of the Constable's Palace in Jaén", *Early Music* 25 (1997) 661–677.
- KOENIGSBERGER H.G., "Decadence or Shift? Changes in the Civilization of Italy and Europe in the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* V/10 (1960) 1–18.
- LARGIER N., "Inner Senses – Outer Senses: The Practice of Emotions in Medieval Mysticism", in JAEGER C.S. – KASTEN I. (eds.), *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter*, Trends in Medieval Philology 1 (Berlin – New York: 2003) 3–15.
- MACEY P., *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* (Oxford: 1998).
- MAFFEI CELSO, *Delitiosa explicatio de sensibilibus deliciis paradisi* (Verona, Lucas Antonius Florentinus: 1504).
- MCDANNELL C. – LANG B., *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: 2001).
- MCKINNON J., "Christian Antiquity", in idem (ed.), *Antiquity and the Middle Ages: From Ancient Greece to the 15th Century*, Man & Music 1 (Houndmills – London: 1990) 88–119.
- MURRAY P., "Art Historians and Art Critics, IV: XIV Uomini Singolari in Firenze", *The Burlington Magazine* 99 (1957) 330–336.
- NICHOLS S.G. – KABLITZ A. – CALHOUN A. (eds.), *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames* (Baltimore: 2008).
- PIERROZZI ANTONINO, *Sancti Antonini Archiepiscopi Florentini ordinis Praedicatorum Summa Theologica in quatuor partes distributa* (Verona, Augustinus Caractonius: 1740, Repr. Graz 1959).
- PIETSCHMANN K., *Kirchenmusik zwischen Tradition und Reform: Die päpstliche Kapelle und ihr Repertoire unter Papst Paul III. (1534–1549)*, Capellae Apostolicae sextinaeque collectanea acta monumenta 11 (Vatican: 2007).
- , *Medici*, in Finscher L. (ed.), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik begründet von Friedrich Blume. Zweite, neubearbeitete Ausgabe, Personenteil* 11 (Kassel – Stuttgart: 2003) 1449–1452.
- PROULX LANG A., *Poggio Bracciolini's De Avaritia: A Study in Fifteenth Century Florentine Attitudes Toward Avarice and Usury*, MA Thesis (University of Montreal: 1973).
- RIMBERTINUS BARTHOLOMAEUS, *De deliciis sensibilibus paradisi* (Venice, Soardis: 1498).

- SAVONAROLA G., *Prediche sopra Aggeo*, ed. L. Firpo (Rome: 1965).
——, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. P. Ghiglieri, 3 vols. (Rome: 1971).
——, *Prediche sopra i salmi*, ed. V. Romano (Rome: 1969).
STROHM R. – CULLINGTON J.D. (eds.), *On the Dignity & the Effects of Music: Egidius Carolerius, Johannes Tinctoris: Two Fifteenth-Century Treatises* (London: 1996).
WEGMAN R.C. (ed.), "Music as Heard: Listeners and Listening in Late-medieval and Early Modern Europe (1300–1600)", *The Musical Quarterly* 82 (1998) 427–691.
——, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: 2008).
WIDLOECHER N., *La Congregazione dei canonici regolari lateranensi: Periodo di formazione (1402–1483)* (Gubbio: 1929).
WILSON B., *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford: 1992).
ŽAK S., "Der Quellenwert von Giannozzo Manettis Oratio über die Domweihe von Florenz 1436 für die Musikgeschichte", *Die Musikforschung* 40 (1987) 2–32.