New Light on the Origin of "Missa de Angelis"

Author(s): H. V. Hughes


Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3701969

Accessed: 16-01-2016 23:13 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
While all who 'tempt their fame's superior blaze, 
Shine, and gladly shine, but with reflected rays.
Their Orchestration that met our wondering view,
Spoke with the master's soul in '62.
Their Boxes, Overture, Drum, Snuff, Pianoforte
Transform'd my Cabinet to an Empyrean Court;
We hail their Flute instruments self-acting,
Th' lyre-winged Muse me (Loretto like) escort,
Self-acting musical clock pianofortes,
Lo English Concertinas do appear
In answering notes; I may not name them here;
But they're the representatives of Nicol Frères.
In some cathedral vast or civic dome,
Their spirit wonder-works shall find a home.
The mode of action, I all arduous watched,
Th' additional time-regulator attach'd
To th' main machin'ry which th' rallentando
Obtains, and, too, the accelerando.
In furtherance of your works I will engage,
O blest enchanter of a miraculous age;
Corporation themes or songs of Zion,
Shall make the winds thro' the Orchestra.

As a final specimen of these curious poetical appreciations, we reproduce an advertisement emanating from the establishment of Owen & Stoddart, who in 1856 occupied premises in Red Lion Square, Holborn, and patented a new type of pianoforte called 'The Emperor':

How shall the enraptured Muse the works declare
Of Owen & Stoddart, in Red Lion Square.
To Mr. William Stoddart of our firm
In whom from the period of his birth, the germ
Of high intellect rose in the world's mind,
Sufficient to make up for all mankind.
Once in Columbia he stood confest,
And still his memory illumines all the West.
Why should we wonder? His angelic art
Should elevate the soul, enlarge the heart.
His triumphs by millions I might here recount
And fill with echoes all the sacred mount.
But I must leave them at the present, for
Great attention now demands 'The Emperor,'
New order of Piano—his latent
Energies he revived by the Queen's Letters Patent,
And I have listened to those glorious works by him,
As if in transform'd; the wings of Seraphim
Fell'd gales of Paradise like radiant lyres
Attn'd, and suns and systems join'd th' immortal quire;
And this Piano far surpasses all
That within the Bard's cognisance did fall,
In its rare quality of tone and touch
No generation ever play'd on such.
In its construction, glory of my song!
The beautiful is combined with the strong,
Enabling it to keep in tune twice as long
As instruments call'd once our country's pride,
And most approved by all the world beside.
How lovely the Emperor appears,
The bright Enchantment of our wondrous years!
Not to stand flat against a cold dead wall,
But where the artiste can be seen by all.
And oh! what holy visions round me rise,
There, like some spirit-haired grove of Paradise,
With high binnings fill'd; it doth seem to bloom,
(All finish'd to stand in the middle of the room);
And the tone while it doth in the centre stand,
Is astonishing—all equal to a Grand—
And so assists the voice in singing, that it known,
That much person scarce would know their own.
For this great wonder there, too, is a cause,
And answerable all by nature's laws:
By the two vibrating sounding-boards are sent,
Of the passages of many of the instrument.
Through flying centuries far would I prolong
Their wizard deeds in my enchanted song,
And make the old world from oblivion start,
And attune a new creation for Owen & Stoddart.

Church and Organ Music.

NEW LIGHT ON THE ORIGIN OF
'MISSA DE ANGELIS.'
BY H. V. HUGHES.

Of all the historic treasures of the Church's older music, few create wider interest than the wonderful 'Missa De Angelis.' It occupies a position unique in the liturgical songs of the Catholic Church, for it is dignified with a place in the latest editions of the official books of Rome, after but not among the other plainsong Masses of the Ordinarium Missae. The reason is musical rather than liturgical, for De Angelis is historically and musically different from the rest, being written in a mode which is identical in its intervals with our modern major tonality. Experience has shown this service to possess a marvellous vitality and popularity, extending over hundreds of years, and a beauty which needs only to be heard in order to be appreciated. In certain whole districts in Northern France as well as in certain other churches in the West of Europe, it is the 'standing dish' at the Sunday Mass, a real common song of the people, known and loved by them for generations. Many adaptations of the music to English words have been published during the last fifty years, and the service is becoming a serious rival to the less melodious Merbecke. It holds, to some extent, a balance between the more austere 'orthodox' plainsong, and melodiousness in our modern C major sense.

Before proceeding further it may be pointed out that the service divides musically into two sections:

1. De Angelis proper, i.e., the Kyrie, and Gloria in Excelsis and Credo which are built up on the melodies of the Kyrie; and
2. The Sanctus and Agnus Dei, to which the melodies of the now extinct office of St. Nicholas have been fitted. This division has been recognised in more than one printed book of the last century, in which a different Sanctus and Agnus have been added to the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo.

It is with the former that we are mainly concerned, for the problem of the latter part is simple, the only question being what time the Credo song of the old St. Nicholas office was adapted to the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Of this we have no certain knowledge, but if we hazard a guess somewhere about 1264 we shall probably be on the right track, for it was in 1264 that Urban IV. commissioned St. Thomas of Aquinas to prepare an office for the new feast of Corpus Christi, and we find that for the Antiphon to Magnificat in the first Vespers of the feast (O quam suavis) the same melody has been used, namely, that of 'O Christi pietas,' the Antiphon to Magnificat at the second Vespers of St. Nicholas. There is no trace in the office of St. Nicholas of the Kyrie melody of De Angelis, and there seems little doubt that the two parts are different in origin. As regards mode, they are both Lydian; but in range they are distinct. Thus we find that editions in modern notation usually place the Sanctus and Agnus in the 'seat' of the mode, i.e., with the final on F, while transposing the Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo down to the key of E flat or even D.

* The Gloria and Sanctus have even penetrated into the books of the conservative chaplains of the Monastic rite at Toledo—see Dom Poitier's article in Revue du chant grégorien, 1904-05, p. 118.
† See the facsimile of the Sarum Antiphonale, published by the Philological and Mediaeval Music Society, plate viii, column 2. The Vatican edition suggests 11th and 12th century for the Sanctus, and 13th for the Agnus.
Recent attempts to fix the date of the Kyrie-section, or De Angelis proper, show at a glance what progress has been made in this corner of the field of plainsong research during the last twenty years. In 1903 the date was said to be '17th or 18th century'; in the following year Gastoué, in his 'Principaux chants liturgiques,' pronounced it 16th century at least; Gaspéquier followed in the Récue du Chant Grégorien for January, 1905, by referring the melody back to Ante litteram, an Alleluia verse from a Franciscan Proper of the 14th century. He suggests that the composer of the Kyrie de Angelis used this melody in his work, and he traces also the Kyrie itself to an Ordinary of Bayeux vaguely dated by Chevallier as 13th to 15th century. The same scholar notes in the Récue two months later another Franciscan MS., dated 1402, with both Kyrie and Gloria in two-part descant, named 'Kyrie Lombardi.' Gastoué, in July, 1905, notes in the same journal a Rouen MS. (Paris. B.N. lat. 904) of the end of the 14th century.

But in the British Museum (Arundel 14) is a curious MS. to which a still earlier date is to be assigned, 13th to 14th century—which seems to have escaped notice hitherto. The late Prof. Wooldridge did not include it in 'Early English Harmony,' nor, as far as I know, has any other writer either on harmonized or liturgical music quoted it. And yet on folio 35 is found the Kyrie de Angelis scored for three voices, with the melody in the lowest part. The transcription of this is of such interest that it is reproduced here:

The first thing we notice about the melody as given here is that it has all the characteristics of folk-song: if anyone is sceptical about this let him sing over the phrase beginning at (a) (noting specially the unusual E at (b)), and be converted. Next we observe that the form of the melody is simpler than the received version. We should not be right in ascribing this simplification to the exigencies of the harmony; counterpoint of this period, indeed, talked much but cared little for exigencies, and we invariably find that plainsong phrases when taken for canti fermi in the 13th century preserve their melodic outline almost intact, though varying their rhythm to suit the new requirements of the composer. We may in the absence of other evidence take this form as purer and more primitive than the one in use to-day.

The manuscript contains three other Kyriles of similar musical form, all of which are very strongly suggestive of folk-song; in fact the fourth begins and ends unblushingly in the key of C major. And it may or may not be worth mentioning that the body of the MS. contains Giraldis Cambrensis 'Descriptio Hiberniae'; his remarks on English part-singing in the 12th century have often been quoted from his 'Descriptio Cambriae.'

We have been accustomed to look upon De Angelis as a foreign or Continental service, and some people have even classed it in public with the Missa Regia and the other two 'conceived' plainsong Masses of Henri Dumont, which were written at the end of the 17th century. But until earlier evidence (which perhaps this article may provoke) is found on the other side of the Channel we shall be justified in claiming the Kyrie de Angelis (if not the whole service) as a product of England, owing its origin to an adaptation of English folk-song to the Liturgy.