

Musical Variety of the Five *Ars Antiqua* Motets

The motet is one of the most intellectual forms of composition in the Middle Ages. By looking closely at a few *Ars antiqua* motets, we see how composers in that time combine texts, rhythmic motives and complex polyphony into a single relatively short composition. Although we can simply describe a motet to be a two-voice or three-voice composition with different texts sung by each individual voice, there are tremendous varieties among the motets in the *Ars antiqua*. In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate differences and similarities, in terms of rhythms, harmony and other musical features, among five motets selected from three sources. The first three motets from the transcription *Cent motets* by Aubry are *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*, *Ypocrite/O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*, *Povre secours/ Gaude/Angelus*.¹ The fourth one is *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*, which is from an anthology compiled by Roden, Wright and Simms.² The last one is *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes*, which is an edition taken from the fifth fascicle of the Montpellier Codex.³

The origin of the motets was in the *Ars antiqua*, which generally refers to the late twelfth century to the thirteenth century.⁴ A motet is a result of an experiment in the Notre Dame School where the newly written texts were added to the caudas of conductus

¹ Pierre Aubry, *Cent motets du XIIIe siècle, publiés d'après le manuscrit Ed. IV. 6 de Bamberg*. (New York: Broude Brothers, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 89-91, 163-167 and 71-73, respectively.

² Timothy Roden, Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Anthology for Music in Western Civilization* (Canada: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), vol. A, pp. 76-78.

³ Mark Everist, *French Motets in the Thirteenth Century*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 58-60

⁴ “*Ars antiqua*,” in *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, edited by Don Michael Randel. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 529-530.

and melismas of organum in the early thirteenth century.⁵ Originally, a motet was a discant clausula, basically a self-contained section of a longer polyphonic composition in note-against-note style, with a new poetic text added into the upper voice.⁶ Usually the added text was in Latin, but later French was used also. The result was a bilingual motet in French and Latin. The added line was called a motetus, and the lowest voice was called a tenor. When people added one more voice above a motetus, the term triplum was used. Although all motets discussed in this paper are three-voice motets, there were also many motets composed in the early thirteenth century in two voices or even four voices. A tenor of a motet was usually a section of a pre-existing chant. When the motets became more popular outside the cathedral of the Notre Dame School by the end of thirteenth century, composers started to write new and fresh tenor parts, which could be related to anything, even fresh strawberries, which is the translation of the tenor of *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*.⁷ With the widespread of the motets, differences in musical features among the motets began to emerge. We will first compare the rhythmic differences among the five motets.

While the rhythms of the motets from *Cent Motets* can be described using the traditional rhythmic modes set by Anonymous IV,⁸ there are also the motets in which their rhythms do not fall into any modes. In his transcription *Cent Motets*, Aubry specifies the rhythmic mode of every voice. In *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*, the

⁵ Ernest Sanders and Peter Lefferts, "Motet," in *Grove Music Online*, edited by L. Macy. <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>. Accessed 5 March 2007.

⁶ Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization* (USA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), vol. I, p. 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

rhythmic mode is mode 6 for the triplum and mode 1 for the motetus.⁹ Two other motets from *Cent Motets* are *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*, which is in mode 6 for the triplum and mode 2 for the motetus, and *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus*, which is in mode 3 for the triplum and mode 5 for the motetus.¹⁰ However, the rhythmic mode might not be exactly the mode specified. Figure 1 shows that, while the rhythmic mode of the triplum is clearly in mode 6, the motetus is a slight variant of mode 1. When we try to specify the rhythmic mode of the motets not from *Cent Motets*, it is not clear which rhythmic mode each voice belongs to. Figure 2 is *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*. The triplum is obviously not one of the modes. The motetus and the tenor, though their first two measures are similar to mode 3, become more rhythmically complex in m.3, which are not anymore in mode 3.

Triplum

Y - po - cri - te pseu - do - pon - ti - fi - ces. Ec - cle - si

Motetus

O quam - - sanc - ta. quam be - ni

Figure 1: The opening of *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*.

⁹ Aubry, *Cent motets*, vol. 3, p. 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79, 83.

Figure 2 shows the opening of a musical piece. It consists of three staves: Triplum, Motetus, and Tenor. The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: On pa - ro - le de battre et de van-ner et de fo - ÿr et A Pa - ris soir et ma - Fre - - - se nou - - - ve - - - le, de han - ner mais ces de - dui trop me des tin trov[e] on bon pain et bon cler - - - vin, mue - re fran - ce, mue - re, nue - re fran - - - ce!

Figure 2: The opening of *On parole de battre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*.

Figure 3 shows two sections of a musical piece. Section a. shows measures 1-3. The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: Po - vre se - cours ai on - co - re re - co Gau - de, cho - rus om - ni. Section b. shows measures 22-24. The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: Tout mon de - sir e - ÿsse a - che - vé. Sous of - fer - - - to - ri - - - um.

Figure 3: Two sections from *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus*.

The rhythmic relationships and interactions between the triplum, the motetus and the tenor can be either independent or closely related. By looking at the first four measures of *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus* in Figure 3a, we see that the rhythms of the triplum and the motetus are almost identical. In m. 3, the triplet in the triplum is

responded by the motetus. This rhythmic interaction between voices appears throughout this motet. Furthermore, the dialogue between the triplum and the motetus is occasionally extended to two measures (see Figure 3b). The close rhythmic interaction in *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem* is, however, not between the triplum and the motetus, but between the tenor and the motetus. Near the end of *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*, the tenor responds to the dotted half-notes in the motetus by filling the missing dotted half-notes at the first beat of the measures (see Figure 4). This alternating dotted half-notes between the two voices make the ending of this motet very exciting. The motetus and the tenor in *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele* are, on the other hand, closely linked together in rhythm, as seen in the Figure 2. However, the voices in *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit* and *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes*, although some connections between the voices can be made, are not as closely related as those in the other three motets.

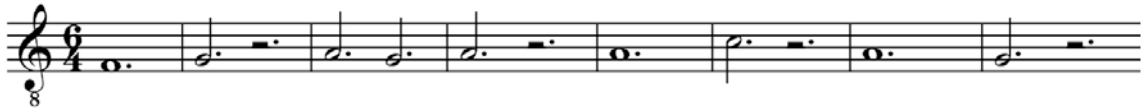
The image shows a musical score for the ending of the motet *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*. It consists of two staves: the upper staff is for the Motetus and the lower staff is for the Tenor. The time signature is 6/4. The Motetus part begins at measure 77 and features a sequence of dotted half notes: O!, O!, O!, O - san - na. The Tenor part begins at measure 78 and features a sequence of dotted half notes: O!, O!, O!, O - san - na. The lyrics are: O! O! O! O - san - na.

Figure 4: The ending of *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*.

Despite the rhythmic complexity in the upper voices, the rhythm of the tenor of every motet consists of a few simple rhythmic motives, which are repeated throughout the piece. The tenor of *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus* is the simplest one. The rhythmic motive is a two-measure phrase with three notes (see Figure 5). Despite the difference in the time signatures of *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem* and *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*, the tenors of both motets are constructed from two rhythmic motives: a three-

short-note motive and a long-short-note motive. In *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*, however, the motives are repeated differently; the first motive is repeated twice after the second motive, while in *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*, the tenor always alternates the two motives evenly throughout the piece. In *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele* and *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes*, the tenors are repeated not only rhythmically, but also melodically. The four-measure phrase of the tenor of *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*, shown previously in Figure 2, is repeated exactly throughout. The four-measure phrase of the tenor in *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes* consists of a smaller two-measure rhythmic motive (see Figure 5). Compared to the rhythmic complexity of the triplum and the motetus, the rhythmic structure of the tenor is surprisingly simple.

Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem



Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit



Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus



Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes



Figure 5: The tenors of the four motets.

To cooperate with the complex rhythmic structure of the triplum and the motetus, the melody in these two voices are mostly stepwise except in *Chorus/In Bethlehem/In Bethlehem* where the melody of the motetus has many leaps. According to tonal music theory of our time, we prefer a stepwise melody to a melody with a lot of leaps. This is because a stepwise motion is more natural and easier to perform, especially by singing. In the fast moving triplum, it is difficult to sing a melody containing many leaps. A stepwise motion creates a flowing movement to the melody line, as we see in most of the triplums of the motets. The motetus, though its pace generally not as rapid as the pace of the triplum, is still mostly in stepwise motion. However, in *Chorus/In Bethlehem/In Bethlehem*, the motetus consists of many leaps, even two consecutive leaps of a fifth. Moreover, the whole motet seems to be based heavily on many leaps of thirds. Even a small section drawn from the entire motet shows four leaps of thirds and one leap of fourth beside two leaps of fifths mentioned earlier (see Figure 6).

11
8 Qui - a pu - er na - - - tus Ti - mens

16
8 prin - ci - pa - - - tus Scep - tro se pri - va

Figure 6: The motetus in *Chorus/In Bethlehem/In Bethlehem*.

Beside the rhythmic complexity of the triplum and the motetus, every motet has richly independent counterpoints between the voices. Since the time of Leoninus and the *Magnus Liber Organi*, the discant style was used mainly in the polyphonic composition, and to create independent melody lines, the contrary counter point between the voices

was preferred, which was also true in the motets.¹¹ In Figure 7, we can see two examples drawn from *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus* and *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes*, which clearly demonstrate the contrary motion between the triplum and the motetus in each motet. However, there are also similar motions between the voices. In Figure 8, beautiful parallel thirds in *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit* are shown. The notes in the triplum in mm. 31-32 become the motetus in mm. 44-45, and vice versa. While the thirds were not considered to be consonances until the *Ars nova*, it is unusual to see the same parallel thirds appear twice in the same motet.¹²

	<i>Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus</i>	<i>Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes</i>
Triplum	<p>17 8 si m'a re - fu - sé; Mais</p>	<p>14 8 ni - e Ne sunt sil-lours mi - pen - se</p>
Motetus	<p>8 Ac pre - sen - tat _____</p>	<p>8 mer Ce - le, qui on-ques ne vi Ses ieuz</p>

Figure 7: Contrary motions in the two motets.

Triplum	<p>30 8 pli - ces No - mi - nant,</p>	<p>43 8 los An - gu - los Ful - mi - nant.</p>
Motetus	<p>8 ris, To - ci - us fons dul</p>	<p>8 fi - li - um. _____ Re - gem</p>

Figure 8: Parallel thirds in *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit*.

¹¹ Wright and Simms, *Music in Western Civilization*, vol I., p. 56.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.71.

The tenors of *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit, Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus* and *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem* can be divided into two almost identical phrases, while those of *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes* and *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele* are simpler and frequently repeated. In Figure 2, we saw how the four-measure phrase in the tenor of *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele* is repeated throughout the motet. The tenor of *Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes* is even simpler; it repeats the four-measure phrase many times without any alteration in pitch. However, the tenors of *Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit, Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus* and *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem* are more complex. Figure 9 shows the reduction of the tenor of *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*, where the vertical line indicates the repetition of the phrase, and the box at the end shows the added note to the end of the motet. It is clear that there are two almost identical parts. There is a slight change near the end of the motet, which is also true for *Ypocrite/O quam sancta/Et gaudebit* and *Povre secours/Gaude/Angelus*, the other two motets from the *Cent Motet*. A few measures had to be added to conclude the motet because of the asymmetric and unsystematic structure of the triplum and motetus phrases.

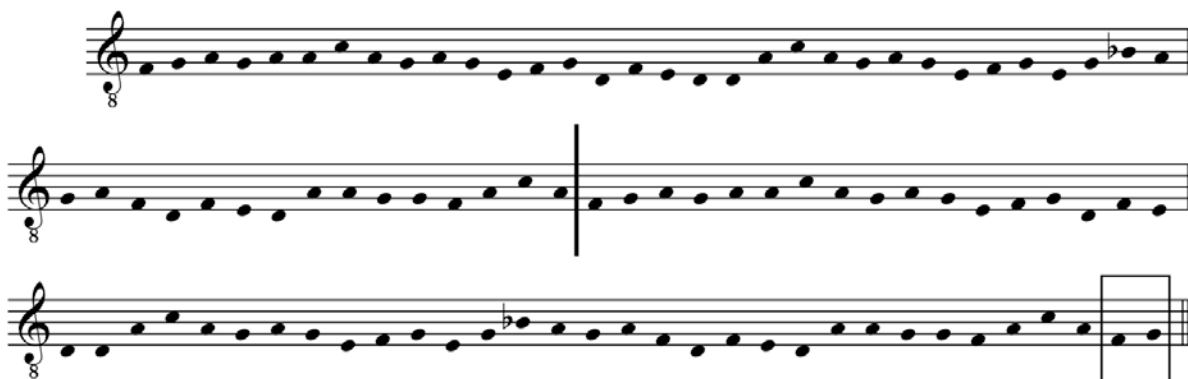


Figure 9: The reduction of the tenor of *Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem*.

31

Triplum

Motetus

Tenor

36

Figure 10: Middle section of in *Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus*.

The structure of the triplum and the motetus is based on a series of phrases of varying lengths. Except for the motetus of the *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*, which is closely locked to the tenor voice, the structure of the triplum and the motetus of the other motets is not a simple repetition of, such as a four-measure phrase or six-measure phrase. In *Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus*, for example, the structure of the upper voices is as follows: the triplum $4(4) + 3(4) + 2(2 + 3) + 3(3) + 4 + 2(3) + 10$, the motetus $2(6) + 8(4) + 2 + 4 + 6$, where the unit is measures.¹³ This odd structure makes the ending of each phrase in every voice hardly coincide with each other, as shown in Figure 10 where the phrases in different voices in *Povre secours/Gaude/ Angelus* do not generally end at the same time. The structure of the other motets is as follows:

¹³ $4(4)$ means $4 + 4 + 4 + 4$, and $2(2+3)$ means $2 + 3 + 2 + 3$.

Ypocrite /O quam sancta/Et gaudebit,

triplum $2(4) + 5 + 8 + 5 + 6 + 4 + 3 + 6 + 5(5) + 2(4) + 2(5) + 7 +$
 $3(2) + 3(4) + 2 + 4 + 6 + 2 + 3 + 9,$
 motetus $12 + 14 + 8 + 6 + 8 + 10 + 12 + 8 + 10 + 6 + 8 + 5 + (6) + 7,$

Je m'en vois/Tiex amout/Omnes,

triplum $2(6) + 2(2) + 4 + 2 + 1 + 3(2),$
 motetus $5(2) + 3.5^{14} + 2(2) + 3.5 + 2 + 6,$

Chorus/In Bethleem/In Bethleem,

triplum $2(3) + 5 + 3 + 3(4) + 5 + 2(4) + 3 + 2(4) + 3 + 4 + 5 + 4 + 5$
 $+ 4 + 7,$
 motetus $6 + 7(4) + 8 + 4 + 7 + 3 + 6 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 3 + 8,$

On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele,

triplum $3 + 4 + 5 + 4$
 motetus $4(4),$ which is the same as the tenor.

In spite of the rhythmic differences and the structure, all of the five motets have approximately the same voice span in each part. Figure 11 shows the range of each voice in each motet discussed in this paper. We can see that the ranges of the tenors are almost identical among the pieces, which is true for the triplums and the moteti despite the shorter range of the triplum of *On parole de batre/A Paris/Frese mouvele*.

¹⁴ 3.5 means the phrase of the motetus ends at the middle of the measure.

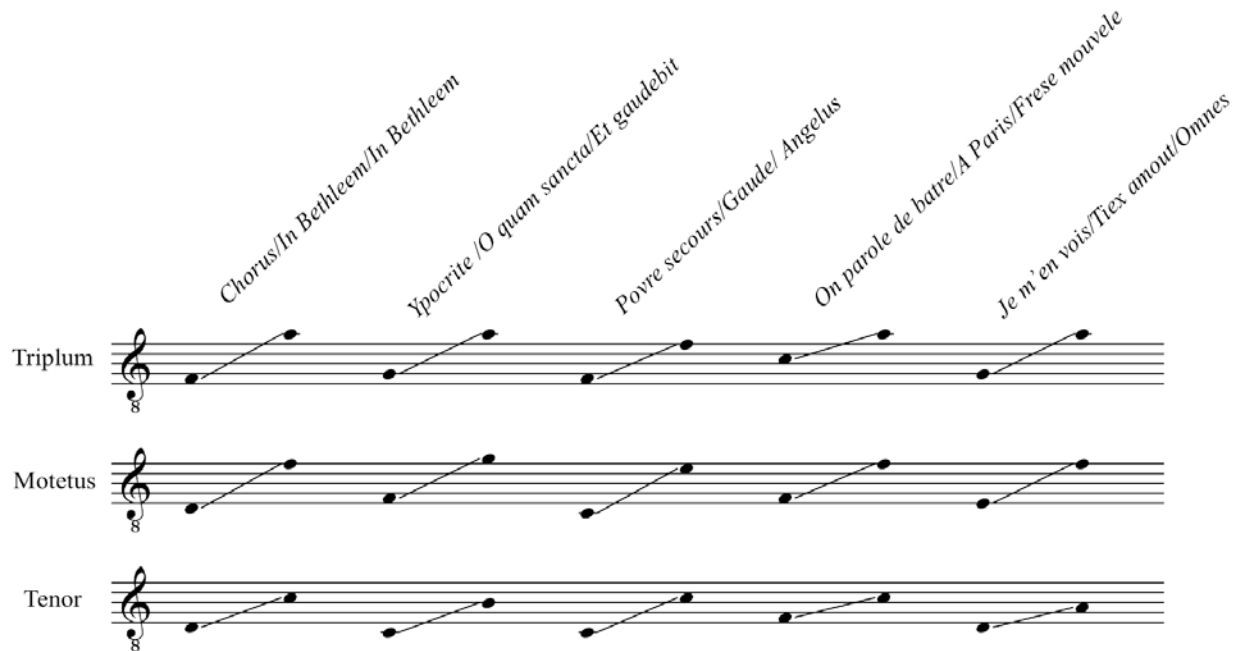


Figure 11: Summary of the vocal ranges of the five motets discussed.

By looking closely at many musical features of the motets in the *Ars antiqua*, we can see how complex and rich those motets are in terms of rhythm, counterpoint and structure. Only five motets are selected and studied in this paper, and we have already seen vast differences in every musical aspect among these motets. The interplay of the rhythms between the triplum and the motetus is strikingly exciting. The structure of the tenor is surprisingly simple, while the constructions of the triplum and the motetus are very complicated and unsymmetrical. These richly diverse motets are only a tiny example from more than a hundred motets contained in *Cent Motet*. The variety of the motets in the *Ars antiqua* is undoubtedly tremendous.