

Browsing Through a Little-Known Manuscript (Prague, Strahov Monastery, D.G. IV. 47)

BY DRAGAN PLAMENAC

WHEN the Viennese editors of the first volume of selections from the Trent Codices set out at the turn of the 19th century to open up the huge repertory contained in that group of 15th-century manuscripts, they made an effort to supplement their thematic index of the codices with a list of concordances drawn from an international array of sources of the same period preserved in Italy, France, Germany, and England.¹ It may be looked upon as irony of fate, but at the same time as an illustration of the state of musical bibliography sixty years ago, that the list of sources compiled by the Viennese scholars made no mention of a volume which not only contains numerous concordances with the manuscripts they were publishing but lay, as it were, at their doorstep, on territory that had for centuries been part of the Habsburg empire. In spite of subsequent references in musicological literature the source alluded to—Prague, Strahov Monastery, D.G.IV. 47—is still very imperfectly known, if at all, to the average Western scholar. To a large degree this is a consequence of the fact that the only study that deals with the manuscript to any appreciable extent is written in the Czech language and printed in a publication not exclusively musicological in character. The study, Dobroslav Orel's *Počátky umělého více-*

blasu v Čechách ("The Origins of Polyphonic Art-Music in Bohemia") is found in Vol. I, No. 8 of the *Sborník filozofické fakulty university Komenského v Bratislave* ("Miscellany of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bratislava"), 1922, where it occupies pages 143 to 214.

The essay was really a by-product of Orel's doctoral dissertation, submitted to the University of Vienna in 1913, which dealt with another important source of Renaissance polyphony in Bohemia, the *Speciálník* Codex preserved at the Museum in Hradec Králové. There were two main reasons that prompted Orel to select the *Speciálník* as the subject of his dissertation: it is by far the most voluminous collection of Renaissance polyphony that has survived in Bohemia, and it contains, in addition to a rich repertory of works by foreign (mostly Franco-Netherlandish) composers, a number of compositions with Czech titles or ascribed in the source to composers with Czech names, which of course testifies to a Czech origin of the manuscript. This was also the reason why Orel, in examining in his study of 1922 the repertory preserved in this group of sources, used the *Speciálník* as a point of departure and dealt with the Strahov Codex only incidentally.²

² The Strahov Manuscript has also been mentioned by Orel in a paper written in German and published in the *Guido Adler-Festschrift* (1930), pp. 87-91 ("Stilarten der Mehrstimmigkeit des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts in Böhmen"), but in completely cursory fashion. Some of the data found in Orel's *Počátky* have subsequently been utilized by W. Stephan in his *Die burgundisch-niederländische Motette zur Zeit Ockeghems*, 1937, in so far as they were relevant to the subject of the latter study.

Although the two manuscripts have a number of compositions in common, the Strahov Codex differs basically from the *Speciálník* in that its repertory does not include works by Czech composers or with Czech text and its provenance is unknown. As will be seen, however, certain features make possible a conjecture in this respect.

While less voluminous than the *Speciálník*, the Strahov Codex by virtue of its sheer bulk—it contains 306 folios (610 pages), 21.5 × 15 cm in size—ranks with the more important sources of polyphonic music of the later 15th century. It is by no means a carefully written collection; errors and negligences abound in it. The scribe's handwriting shows affinity with the handwriting in parts of the Trent Codices. The manuscript's prime interest resides in its repertory, which consists overwhelmingly of sacred works by Western composers of the 15th century, except for a few secular pieces scattered here and there through the volume. Adding to its interest is the fact that the sacred repertory appears to have been grouped according to a systematic plan based on a variety of musico-liturgical forms and at times on the sequence of the ecclesiastical year. The MS opens with an extended group of 49 anonymous polyphonic Mass Intros, a number of which may also be found in the Trent Codices. This group is followed by a group of Kyries and other sections of the Ordinary, Alleluias, motets, hymns, and Magnifi-

cats. As far as composers are concerned, Orel, on page 185 of his *Počátky*, gives a list of names appearing either in the *Speciálník* or in one of the other Bohemian sources containing polyphonic music, including the Strahov Codex; but careful scrutiny will show that Orel's list of names is seriously defective. Ascriptions found in Strahov comprise the following names, in the order of their appearance in the manuscript: Standly, T(h)aurant(h), philipi (Philipi ffrant . . . [?], Phi.), pilois Johannes, flemmik, Batty, watlin frew, duffay. Identifications that can be made on the basis of attributions in other sources include Barbingant and Barth. Brollo. Of these names, those of Standly, philipi, watlin frew, duffay, and Brollo have been completely omitted in Orel's list.

Among composers whose names appear in the Codex, Touront and Pillois are represented with comparatively numerous compositions. It is interesting to state that these two men are also exceptionally well represented in the Trent collections and in such an outstanding south-German source as the Schedel Liederbuch in Munich. Standley, an English composer, can also be found in Trent. Works by this group of composers seem to have belonged to a common stock of compositions favored by scribes of the period in south-German border areas. "Batty", by whom there are in Strahov two *Regina caeli laetare*, might possibly be identical with H. Battre, whose works occupy the final fascicles in Trent Codex 87. Barth. Brollo's apparently extremely popular *Entrepris suis par grant lyesse* (Oxford, Can. misc. 213), found in the Schedel and Glogau songbooks as well as in the Buxheim Organ Book (No. 106), turns up in Strahov, fol. 239^v-240, as a *contra-*

¹ *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich* VII (1900), p. 29.

factum, Congratulamini michi omnes. Viminibus cinge, a cryptic Latin piece with overtones of a magical incantation formula and involving isorhythmic features, has been known to date from a single copy in Glogau (No. 142).³ Another copy of the piece may be found in Strahov, fol. 252^r-253. Of *O florens rosa*, which bears an attribution to Walter Frye in Schedel and is found with the substituted text "Ave regina" in Trent 90 (No. 1087), there are in Strahov two copies, fol. 204^f and 251^f, both anonymous.

If, in addition to the above-mentioned correspondences between the Strahov Codex and some of the best-known south-German manuscripts of the period, further support were needed to buttress the theory of a southeastern-German origin of the Strahov scribe, it could be found in the appearance in the MS of hitherto unknown polyphonic versions of 15th-century German lieder and of German words accompanying some of the sacred compositions included in the volume. Since I have discussed these pieces in a paper presented at the Congress of the International Musicological Society in Cologne in June 1958,⁴ there is no need to return to the matter here.

Summing up what has been said, there are strong reasons to believe that the Codex was compiled in one of the monasteries located in the border area between Bohemia and Silesia by a German scribe, in contrast to the *Speciálník* Codex of whose central-Bohemian provenance and Czech character there cannot be

³Published, not altogether successfully, by H. Ringmann in *Das Erbe deutscher Musik*, Reichsdenkmale, Band 8 (1937), pp. 16-17.

⁴An abstract of the paper with photographic reproductions of three pieces may be found in the Congress Report (*Bericht* etc., 1959), pp. 214-215.

any doubt.⁵ On account of the outstanding repertory of 15th-century sacred polyphony that it contains, the Strahov Codex commands our full attention. Our aim here is only to draw attention to a few points of interest, since a comprehensive study of the manuscript is in preparation.⁶

AN UNKNOWN BALLADE BY
WALTER FRYE

Our knowledge of the works of this 15th-century English composer has been greatly advanced by recent writings of American scholars. Let us point here above all to Manfred Bukofzer's researches, which were summarized in his article on Frye in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* IV, 1069ff, and Sylvia Kenney's Yale dissertation of 1955, part of which has been printed in this *JOURNAL*, Vol. VIII, pp. 182-202, under the title "Contrafacta in the Works of Walter Frye".

Among the works that can be ascribed to Frye with certainty, on the basis of documentary evidence, there are two secular compositions in ballade form, originally set to English words, *Alas, alas is my chief song* and *So ys emprentid in my remembrance*, and a French rondeau, *Tout a par moy*. Ascription of the two English ballades to Frye is based on evidence furnished by the two most important sources that contain works

⁵That sources of Bohemian origin occasionally exerted influence on West German sources is evident from a MS at Trier. See R. Ewerhart, "Die Handschrift 322/1994 der Stadtbibliothek Trier" (*Kölner Beiträge zur Musikforschung* VII, 1955).

⁶The Codex has been made the subject of a doctoral dissertation, in progress at the University of Illinois, by a former graduate student of mine, Mr. Robert J. Snow. At the Spring meeting of the Midwest Chapter of the A.M.S., held in St. Louis in May 1959, Mr. Snow presented a paper dealing with a musico-liturgical form of the period, ample use of which is made in the Strahov Codex: the Mass-motet cycle.

of the English composer in the smaller forms: the Mellon Chansonnier in the Yale University Library and the Schedel Liederbuch in Munich. *Alas, alas* is found in Mellon without the name of a composer but appears in Schedel with an attribution to "Frey" under the guise of a *contrafactum* with sacred text ("O sacrum convivium"). Of *So ys emprentid* there exist no less than eight copies in various sources displaying a startling diversity as to accompanying texts. In fact, Mellon is the only source in which the piece is found with its presumably original English words; in all the other sources the composition is found accompanied by either one of two French texts differing from one another, or as a *contrafactum* with sacred Latin text. A list of concordances may be found on p. 199 of Miss Kenney's article, mentioned above. As far as *Tout a par moy* is concerned, the Mellon MS is again the only source that carries the correct attribution to Frye, for the Nivelles de la Chaussée Chansonnier ascribes the piece to Binchois, which is almost surely erroneous. In all other sources the chanson is found without the name of a composer.

In addition to the three pieces named, Miss Kenney's list of chansons by Frye includes another English ballade, *Myn hert is lust*, found anonymous in the Mellon manuscript. In ascribing the composition to Frye Miss Kenney followed a suggestion that had first been advanced by Bukofzer "on stylistic and linguistic grounds."⁷ However, the composition, much better known with a French text beginning *Grant temps ai eu*, to which it is set in four

⁷See Bukofzer's essay on the Mellon Chansonnier in *The Musical Quarterly* XXVIII (1942), p. 25.

other sources, is ascribed in two of them to another 15th-century English composer, Bedingham. At the time he suggested Frye as the composer of *Myn hert is lust*, Bukofzer was unaware of the identity between the Mellon piece and *Grant temps ai eu*. After he became aware of the identity he dropped his suggestion that the composition be given to Frye, and his article in *MGG* lists only the three chansons previously mentioned as authentic works by Frye in the small forms of secular music.

Since works by Frye are so few in number, the smallest addition to them is of considerable interest. On fol. 245^r (p. 489) there appears in Strahov a textless two-part composition inscribed "watlin frew" (see Plate 1); the opposite recto page contains an equally textless three-part piece ascribed to "Tauranth" (*i.e.* Johannes Touront). It has been said before that some manuscripts of southern- or southeastern-German origin, such as the Schedel and Glogau song-books, show affinities in their respective repertories with the repertory found in Strahov. Moreover, Schedel is one of the most important repositories of works by Frye, containing as it does three motets by the composer and one chanson under the guise of a *contrafactum*. It has also been pointed out above that Frye's song-motet *O florens rosa* is found in Strahov twice, without ascription to a definite composer. All this shows that Frye was one of a limited group of composers whose works were favored by scribes of the region. There can be little doubt that "watlin frew" is nothing more than a corruption of Frye's name, as entered in an unknown source from which it was copied into the Strahov MS. It is well to remem-

suggests an originally mixed, vocal-instrumental manner of performance for these compositions. In the later sources (after 1500) the text is found added to all voices, which reflects the growing popularity of a *cappella* performance.

As concerns the Strahov setting, it must be stated that in accordance with general 15th-century practice the hymn-text in it is added only to the Superius. However, the primary bearer of the hymn-tune here is not the Superius, as is the rule in the accredited Dufay settings, but the Tenor, which retains rather faithfully the shape of the original melody. In connection with this, another statement must be made: the tune on which the Strahov setting is based is usually associated in older hymnals with the text *Ad cenam agni providi* rather than with *Exultet caelum laudibus*. It is with the *Ad cenam* text that the tune appears in the Worcester Hymnal (Chapter Library of Worcester Cathedral, F. 160)¹², whereas Dufay's known setting of *Exultet caelum laudibus* (*Das Chorwerk* 49, p. 20f) is based on a different melody.

The general style-characteristics of the Strahov setting, when compared to Dufay's early hymn cycle, and the fact that the name is added exclusively to a subsidiary voice-part, the Contratenor 2^{us}, tend to disprove the view that the setting in its entirety might be claimed for the 15th-century composer. The circum-

¹² Complete facsimile reproduction in *Paléographie musicale* XII (1922). The melody is reproduced under No. 414 (p. 189) in Vol. I ("Hymnen I") of the *Monumenta Monodica Medii Aevi*, B. Stäblein ed. (1956). According to Stäblein (pp. 562-3), the tune paraphrased in the Strahov setting enjoyed considerable popularity. Probably of northern French or English origin, it was widely known in France, England, Germany, Bohemia, and Denmark as early as the 13th century.

stance, however, that the name of Dufay entered in this place is the only instance of a composer's name appearing in the hymn and Magnificat sections of the Strahov Codex definitely supports the view that this entry is of greater significance and not simply due to a scribe's whim or error. It seems likely that we are confronted with a three-part composition by an unknown composer, to which Dufay, for reasons of greater richness of texture and fullness of sound, has added a fourth part of his own. Such additions are frequently encountered in sources of the period, applied both to secular chansons and to sacred compositions in smaller forms of a song-like character. The three-part *Ques mi vida* by the Spaniard Cornago was thus transformed into a four-part composition by Ockeghem, who replaced Cornago's Contratenor with two contratenor parts of his own composition, while Ockeghem's *D'ung aultre amer* was in turn provided with an added Bassus by an unknown composer. Similarly, Colinet de Lannoy's three-part *Cela sans plus* was fitted with a Bassus by Johannes Martini. It would be easy to adduce a considerable number of similar instances.

Thus the hymn-setting in Strahov, even if we decide against claiming it for Dufay in its entirety, remains connected with the great 15th-century composer through the additional part that the latter provided for it. Still, if we prefer to ascribe the entire piece to Dufay, it must of necessity have been a late work, written out of context with the composer's known cycle.

* * *

Many other features make browsing through the Strahov Codex an interesting and rewarding experience.

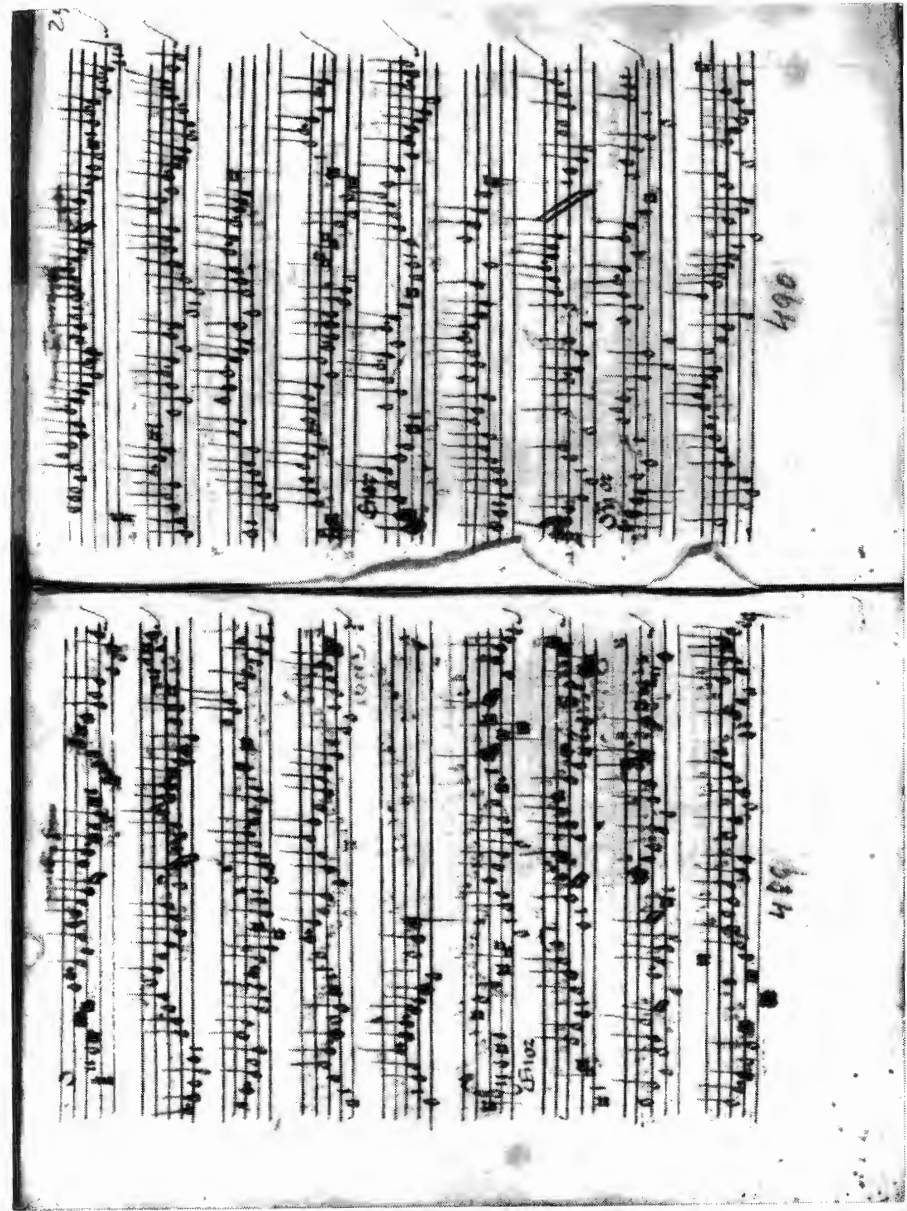


Plate 1
Strahov MS, Folio 245^r (p. 489)
"watlin frey"

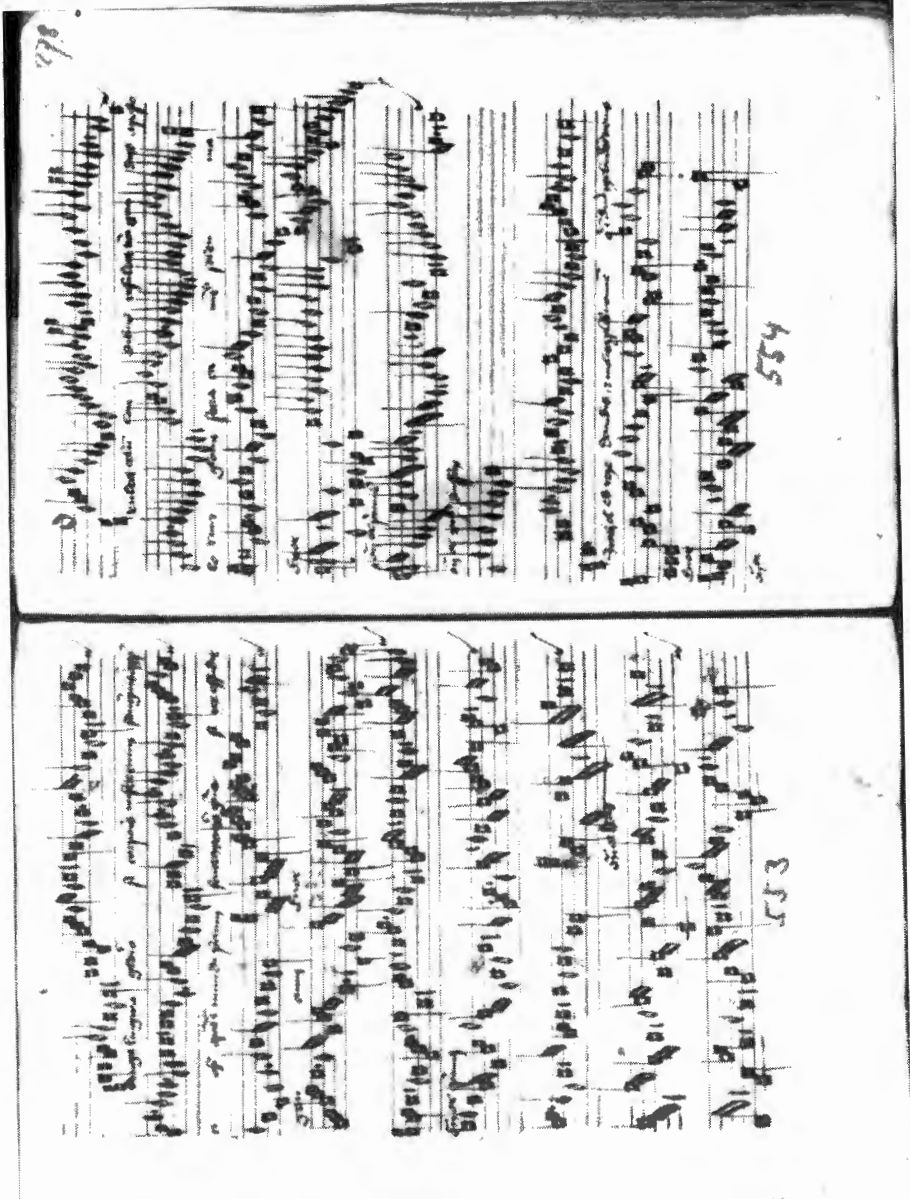


Plate 2
Strahov MS, Folio 278 (p. 554)
"duffay"

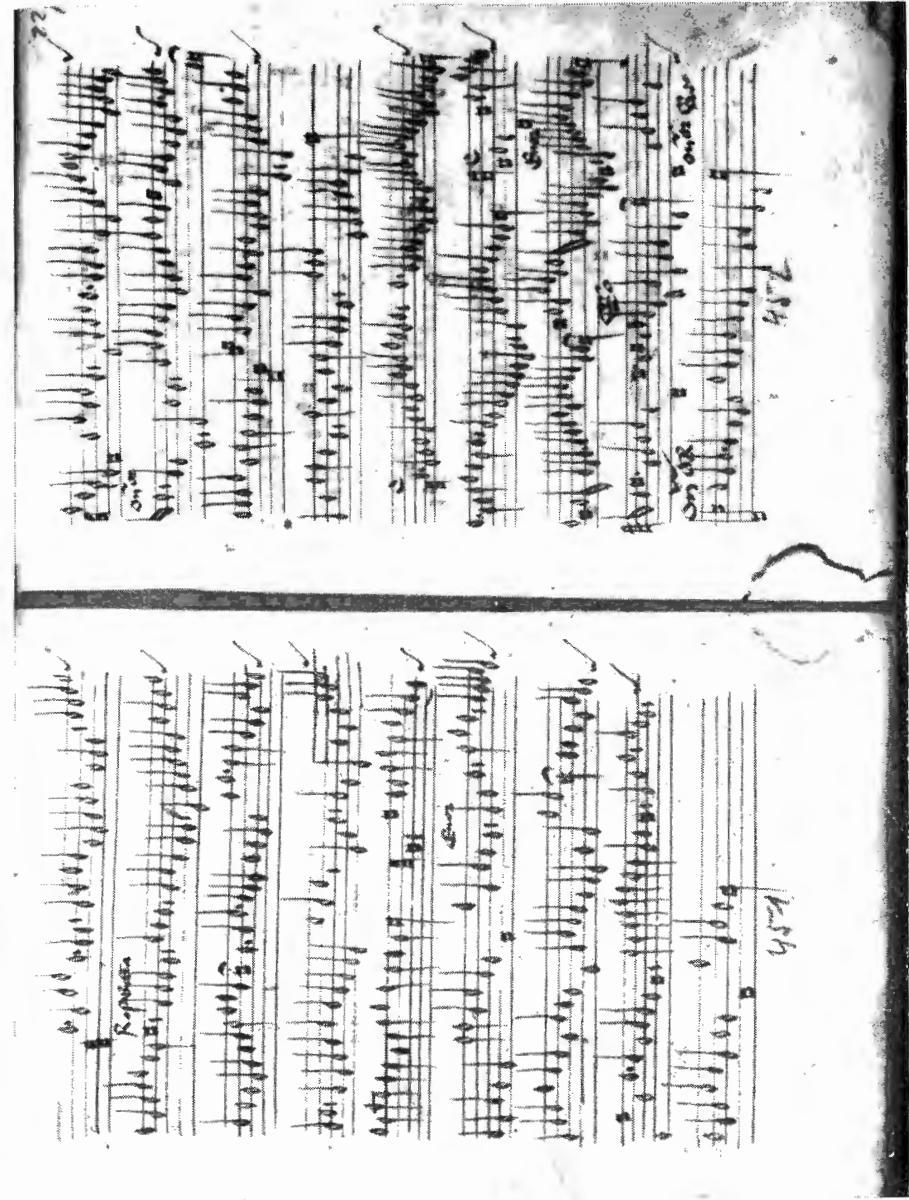


Plate 3
Strahov MS, Folios 226^v-227 (pp. 451-452)
"O Rosa bella"

Ex. 2 Watlin Frew, Strahov, Folio 245^v (p. 489)

Tenor

5

10

15

[ouvert]

20 [clos]

25

30

35

40

45

Ex. 3 Exultet caelum laudibus, Strahov, Folio 278 (p. 554)

Tenor Ex-ul - - tet cae - - lum lau - - di -

Con^or primus (Ex-ul - - tet cae - lum lau - di-

Con^or secundus Duffay

bus, re - sul - tet ter - ra gau - di - is. A - po - sto - lo - rum glo - ri -

bus, re - sul - tet ter - ra gau - di - is. A - po - sto - lo - rum glo - ri -

am sa - cra ca - - - nant sol - le - - mni - - a.

am. sa - cra - - ca - nant sol - le - mni - a.)

- 1) MS *d*.
 2) MS *c*.
 3) Between *a* and *g*, the MS has a superfluous minima *f*.
 4) MS has semibreve rest.
 5) MS has brevis without a dot.
 6) In the MS, the second note in the ligature lacks the dot.
 7) Not altered? (*Cf.* measures 2-3.)

Here are just a few: polyphonic Mass cycles with motets as component parts; works by Touront, Pillois, Standley, not known from other sources; an intriguing name, "flemmik," found in Strahov only; a three-part composition with the initial words "[O] Rosabella" (See Plate 3), the music of which shows no relation to the famous pieces ascribed to Dunstable (Bedingham) and Ciconia; an already mentioned, highly unusual Latin piece, *Viminibus cmge*,

known also from the Glogauer Liederbuch, whose partly isorhythmic character¹³ has been obscured in the modern transcription published in *Das Erbe deutscher Musik*, I, Band 8.

These few remarks may serve to indicate the very real interest that the Strahov Codex holds out to the student of 15th-century polyphony.

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¹³ *Tenor*: seven *tales*, each consisting of 1 semibrevis rest and 12 semibreves.