

A Beginner's Guide to Prophecy

Orlande de Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*

Jonathan Harvey



Jonathan Harvey is a lecturer at Elms College in Chicopee, Massachusetts. He holds a BA from Earlham College and an MM from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.
jonathan.w.harvey@gmail.com

Introduction

Orlande de Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* is a collection about which very little is concretely known. The only version of the work to survive from Lassus's lifetime is a set of four small-format illuminated manuscript partbooks from Duke Albrecht V's court in Munich. The date for the completion of the partbooks is set between 1558 and 1560, since each of the partbooks contains a portrait of the composer captioned "Orlando di Lasso at 28 years of age."¹ As to the date of composition, there is no solid attribution.

Scholarship around *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* has tended to emphasize the composition's adventurous harmonic idiom. The work, which consists of twelve motets, each titled after a specific sibylline prophetess and prefaced by a Prologue, does, indeed, move far beyond Lassus's normal level of chromaticism.² This chromaticism reaches the density of Gesualdo's at times, but serves a different purpose: to highlight the ancient, secret, unusual, and mysterious effect of the poetic texts.³ However, the chromaticism is not anachronistic in any way: it is the by-product of a fashion for such music at the time, motivated largely by Nicola Vicentino and the use of the ancient Greek chromatic tetrachord.

The prophetic poetic texts are part of a history of literary works that draw a line between prophecies of antiquity, and the birth, life, and death of Jesus.⁴ In this formulation, the prophecies supposedly foretell details of Jesus' existence. Considering the Renaissance's fascination with antiquity, this reinforcement of Christian thought originating in the ancient world would have been very important.

Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* is a product of its time, rather than a prophetically mystic beacon of the future of music, as it is sometimes described. If there are to be more performances of this piece, the scholarship around the work needs to be synthesized into a practical performance guide in English. It is the goal of this paper to be that guide. The guide will consist of: a brief familiarization with the outlines of the composer's life; a historical survey of the prophetic tradition in which the collection of motets lies; an analysis of the cycle as a whole; and a proposal of performance methods. As the 450th anniversary of the creation of the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* partbooks approaches, such a guide may be useful for many choirs.



Orlande de Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*

Biographical Context: Orlande de Lassus

There is a distinct lack of documentary evidence pertaining to Lassus's early life. Some facts, however, are relatively widely accepted. He was born in the Flemish province of Mons in Hainaut in either 1530 or 1532. There are unconfirmed accounts that he was a choirboy at St. Nicholas, and that he was abducted three times because of the beauty of his voice.⁵

The first solidly known fact about Lassus is that at the age of 12, he entered the service of Ferrante Gonzaga, a cadet of the Mantuan ducal court and a general in the army of Charles V. He remained in Gonzaga's service until 1549, during which time they travelled from the Low Countries to

Fontainebleau, Mantua, Palermo, and Milan. In 1549, Lassus left Gonzaga and travelled to Naples, where he entered the service of Constantino Castrioto. He probably began composing during this time.⁶

In 1551, Lassus moved to Rome, where he lived in the home of the Archbishop of Florence, Antonio Altoviti. Two years later, he obtained the position of maestro di cappella at St. John Lateran (a position Palestrina would hold two years later), indicating that his renown as a musician was growing. In 1554, he received word that his parents were ill, so he returned to Mons in Hainaut, only to find them already deceased. At this point, there is another historical gap in the documentary evidence. It has been proposed that Lassus may have sojourned

to England and France at this point, in the company of G.C. Brancaccio, but this information is unverified.⁷

In 1555, it is known that Lassus was in Antwerp, and although he held no official post, he was making contacts with such influential figures as Tylman Susato, in whose publishing house he may have worked, and who published Lassus's first collection that year.⁸

One year later, Lassus received an invitation to join the court of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in Munich. He joined as a tenor singer under Kapellmeister Ludwig Daser. Lassus was one of several newly hired Flemish singers at the court, part of a plan by Albrecht V to "netherlandize" the court music.⁹ When the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* partbooks were created in 1558 or 1560,¹⁰ they were



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part of a collection of pieces by Lassus which he presented to Albrecht V in order to gain favor with his new patron. The collection also included the *Sacrae lectiones* and the seven *Penitential Psalms*.

The likeliest date of composition for *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* is sometime between Lassus's appointment at Munich, and the copying of the manuscripts. The argument for this window of time is as follows: if they had been completed earlier (when he was in Antwerp or before), he almost certainly would have published them in Antwerp, where he had been publishing actively, and drawing liberally from his earlier works.¹¹ An argument could be made for a different time of composition: when he was in Naples between 1549 and 1551, living close to the hill and the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl. This situation could have served as inspiration for the subject matter, and word of Vicentino's debates with Vicente Lusitano over the use of chromaticism in music in Rome in early 1551 could have served as an inspiration for the harmonic idiom.¹² Whether *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* was composed 1549–51 or 1556–60, Lassus's proximity to the Cumaean cave and the Vicentino debates certainly influenced the conception of the work.

Regardless of when the work was composed, the gift of the manuscript must have caught Albrecht V's attention: when Daser was pensioned in 1563, Lassus took over leadership of the ducal chapel, a position he held until his death in 1594.¹³

Prophetiae Sibyllarum was not printed until after Lassus's death. It was first published in 1600 by his sons, but then was not included in the *Magnum Opus Musicum*, a gigantic collection of Lassus's motets published in 1604 (also by his sons). Roth has speculated that interest in the Sibyls may have waned by the turn of the century, explaining the work's sporadic inclusion in print.¹⁴

Historical Context: Prophecy and Chromaticism

The larger cultural historical context is, of course, another very important element to framing *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, fixing it in a web of cultural traditions far wider than Lassus's personal biography. Two historical trends or ideas are particularly relevant to

this specific work: the Sibylline tradition, and the increasing use of chromaticism in the mid-sixteenth century.

Sibyls were prophetesses of Apollo from antiquity, specifically ancient Greece. Their significance remained, through appropriation into Christian thought, into the Middle Ages. In the humanistic environment of the early to mid-sixteenth century, especially in Italy (where Lassus spent several formative years), the Sibylline oracles would have been well known and much studied figures, both because of their origins in antiquity, and because of their prophecies' adoption into Christianity.¹⁵

Oracles were consulted in ancient Greece for personal, religious, or political advice. They were conduits to the gods, whose will they could reveal. To be considered genuinely Sibylline, a prophecy had to contain two structural features: it had to be in hexametric verse, and an acrostic of some kind had to be present in the proclamation.¹⁶ Sibylline oracles (the oracle at Delphi being the most famous) were tremendously popular and powerful until the confluence of two particular circumstances. First, the rise of the Roman Republic led to a general despiritualization of Greek life. Second, the popularization of astrology as an alternative method of seeking answers from the gods led to a loss of credibility for the Sibyls.¹⁷

By the Renaissance, the Sibylline tradition had been embellished through literary fantasy, appropriated first by Roman and then Christian thinkers, and had been somewhat standardized into an accepted pseudo-canonical collection. Early Christians had seen the oracles as prophets of the coming of Jesus, similar to the Old Testament prophets. Until the fifteenth century, the accepted number of Sibylline oracles was ten. Filippo Barbieri added two more oracles in a publication in 1481, which prompted a new level of interest in the Sibyls.¹⁸ The new outpouring of publications in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was yet another degree removed from the ancient Christian appropriations. These new publications were often in the vernacular, and were in popular sources. There was a return to the much older Sibylline writings in 1545, with the publication of a newly rediscovered Greek text containing 12 Christian-leaning prophe-

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cies, one from each accepted oracle. Johannes Oporinus published this work, titled *Oracula Sibyllina*, in Basel. A new 1555 Latin edition of these poems is the most likely source of the poems found in the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, giving further credence to a later composition date, in Munich.¹⁹

This winding, multi-layered Sibylline tradition was one major influence on the composition of the piece. Another was the growing use of, and experimentation with, chromaticism. The mid-sixteenth century saw Cipriano de Rore's sometimes highly exploratory works, the debate between Vicentino and Lusitano on the use of chromatic and enharmonic tetrachord genders in modern music,²⁰ and Adrian Willaert's famously esoteric expansion of the gamut in his motet *Quid non ebrietas*.²¹ This chromaticism, however, was of a very different kind than later tonal and post-tonal chromaticism. Vicentino's defense of the use of the chromatic gender in diatonic music referred to melodic, rather than harmonic, motion. Therefore, the chromati-

cism manifested itself as minor-second motion outside the diatonic melodic gamut.²²

Lassus's harmonic language in *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* is in line with this zeitgeist, and is in some ways more conservative. Rather than being experimental, theoretical music, the piece is meant for actual performance, as indicated by its presentation as a set of partbooks. The voice leading is also sometimes unorthodox, and the chromatic gamut is wide, but it rarely breaks contemporary voice-leading rules, and the gamut is consistent with the contemporary expansion occurring in many other pieces.²³

By locating *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* within these trends of Sibylline fascination and chro-

matic expansion, its position as an adventurous but not revolutionary piece is revealed. Although this context generates more questions about the place and time of its origin, rather than conclusively answering any, it is important to see the piece as Lassus and his contemporaries would have viewed it.

Analysis

The poetry of *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, as has been noted earlier, adheres to the hexametric schema required of Sibylline utterances (with the exception of the Prologue, which is not a prophecy, and has only three lines). The stanzas all share other characteristics, as well. They are largely characterized by unusual syntactical constructions, such as incomplete thoughts, parenthetical insertions, and cut-off sentences. This aesthetic is in keeping with the ecstatic character of the utterances, and is depicted by Lassus through the highly chromatic, somewhat aurally disjunct harmonic idiom (Figure 1).²⁴ There is a direct correspondence between the distorted verbal language of the Sibyls and the distorted harmonic language of the settings.

Beyond the general affect of mystery and distortion, the text has a subtler relationship to its setting. Because the declamatory texture is primarily homophonic, and all the pieces are in duple mensuration, Lassus has the opportunity to emphasize certain words or syllables, and bring out the syntax of the poems, by playing with metric placement. The shifts of accentuation, wherein a normal-

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The music is in 4/4 time and features a disjunct harmonic idiom with chromaticism. The lyrics are: "Car - - - mi - na Chro - - - ma - - ti - co, quae". The score is enclosed in a rounded rectangular frame.

Figure 1. Orlando di Lassus, *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, "Prologue," mm. 1-5. Example of disjunct harmonic idiom



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Carmina ulți sta quae audis ulți st tenore,
Haec sunt ilia quibus nostrae olim arcana salutis
Bis senae ulți sta cecinerunt ore Sibyllae.

I. Persica

Virgine matre satus, pando residebit asello,
Iucundus princeps, unus qui ferre salutem
Rite queat lapsis: tamen illis forte diebus
Multi multa ferent, immensi fata laboris.
Solo sed satis est oracula prodere verbo:
Ille Deus casta nascetur virgine magnus.

II. Libyca

Ecce dies veniet, quo aeternus tempore princeps,
Irradians sata laeta, viris sua crimina toilet,
Lumine clarescet cuius synagoga recenti :
Sordida qui solus reserabit labra reorum,
Aequus erit cunctis, gremio rex membra reclinet
Reginae mundi, sanctus, per saecula vivus.

III. Delphica

Non tarde veniet, tacita sed mente tenendum
Hoc opus. Hoc memori semper qui corde reponet,
Huius pertentant cur gaudia magna prophetae
Eximii, qui virginea conceptus ab alvo
Prodibit, sine contactu maris. Omnia vincit
Hoc naturae opera : at fecit, qui cuncta gubernat.

IV. Cimmeria

In teneris annis facie praesignis, honore
Militiae aeternae regem sacra virgo cibabit
Lacte suo : per quem gaudebunt pectore summo
Omnia, et Eoo lucebit sidus ab orbe
Mirificum: sua dona Magi cum laude ferentes,
Obiicient puero myrrham, aurum, thura Sabaea.

V. Samia

Ecce ult, nigras quae toilet laeta tenebras,
Mox veniet, solvens nodosa volumina vatium
Gentis Judaeae, referent ut carmina plebis.
Hunc poterunt clarum vivorum tangere regem,
Humano quem virgo sinu inviolata fovebit.
Annuit hoc coelum, rutilantia sidera monstrant.

VI. Cumana

Iam mea certa manent, et vera, novissima verba,
Ultima venturi quod erant oracula regis,
Qui toti veniens mundo cum pace, placebit,
Ut voluit, nostra vestitus carne decenter,
In cunctis humilis. Castam pro matre puellam
Deliget, haec alias forma praecesserit omnes.

VII. Hellespontica

Dum meditor quondam vidi decorare puellam,
Eximio (castam quod se servaret) honore,
Munere digna suo, et divino numine visa,
Quae sobolem multo pareret splendore micantem:
Progenies summi, speciosa et vera Tonantis,
Pacifica mundum qui sub ditione gubernet.

continued on page 15.

Polyphonic songs which you hear with a chromatic tenor,
these are they, in which our twice-six sibyls once
sang with fearless mouth the secrets of salvation.

I. Persica

The son of a virgin mother shall sit on a crook-backed ass,
the joyful prince, the only one who can rightly bring
salvation to the fallen; but it will happen in those days that
many shall tell many prophecies of great labor.
But it is enough for the oracles to bring forth with a single word:
That great God shall be born of a chaste virgin.

II. Libyca

Behold the days will come, at which time the immortal prince,
sowing abundant crops, shall take away their crimes from men,
whose synagogue will shine with new light;
he alone shall open the soiled lips of the accused,
he shall be just to all; let the king, holy, living for all ages,
recline his limbs in the bosom of the queen of the world.

III. Delphica

He shall not come slowly (but this work must be held with
quiet thought), he who will ever store this in a mindful heart,
why his prophets may announce great joys of this
exalted one, who shall come forth conceived from the
virginal womb without taint of man. This conquers all
the works of nature: yet he has done this who governs all things.

IV. Cimmeria

In her tender years, distinguished with beauty, in honor
the holy virgin will feed the king of the eternal host
with her milk; through whom all things will rejoice
with uplifted heart, and in the east will shine
a marvelous star: Magi bringing their gifts with praise
shall present to the child myrrh, gold, Sabaeian frankincense.

V. Samia

Behold, the joyful day which shall lift the black darkness
will soon come and unravel the knotty writings of the prophets
of the Judean tribe, as the people's songs tell.
They shall be able to touch this glorious ruler of the living,
whom an unstained virgin will nurture at a human breast.
This the heavens promise, this the glowing stars show.

VI. Cumana

Now my most recent words shall remain certain and true,
because they were the last oracles of the king to come,
Who, coming for the whole world with peace, shall be pleased,
as he intended, to be clothed fitly in our flesh,
humble in all things. He shall choose a chaste maiden for his
mother; she shall exceed all others in beauty.

VII. Hellespontica

Once while I was reflecting, I saw him adorn a maiden
with great honor (because she kept herself chaste);
She seemed worthy through his gift and divine authority
to give birth to a glorious offspring with great splendor:
the beautiful and true child of the highest Thunderer,
who would rule the world with peaceful authority.

Orlande de Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*

ly accented syllable is placed in a metrically weak area, or a normally weak syllable is strengthened metrically, allow an even more heightened sense of distortion (Figure 2).²⁵

Some scholars have interpreted *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* as a modally ordered cyclic piece, similar to Lassus's *Lagrima di San Pietro*. According to this analysis, the Prologue and I–II are in mode 8, III–IV in mode 1, V–VI in mode 2, VII–VIII in mode 7,

Figure 2. Orlande di Lassus, *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, "Libyca," mm. 4–9. Example of distortion of text accentuation through meter

IX–X in mode 3 mixed with 4, and XI–XII in mode 6.²⁶ These modal groupings correspond with the clef groupings of the pieces, as well. The 13 pieces in the cycle are thus divided into 6 subgroups, delineated by mode and clef.

The chromaticism of the work is remarkable, but the actual gamut used in the piece is consistent with usage at the time. Most composers limited themselves to a maximum fifteen-step gamut: A^b/G[♯], A, B^b/A[♯], B, C, C[♯], D, E^b/D[♯], E, F, F[♯], and G, with A^b and A[♯] appearing only rarely. This is the exact situation that is found in *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*.²⁷

Formally, the pieces are all through-composed, to the extent that even repeated text units are set differently each time. The numbers do exhibit some formal parallels, though. They all contain episodes of textural variety (added or subtracted voices, homophonic or verging on polyphony). Most strikingly, every motet ends with the last text fragment being repeated, but set to different music, in a rhetorical gesture suggesting finality.

Performance Practice

Historical performance practices must be informed first and foremost by geographic location. During the Renaissance, musical composition was motivated and shaped primarily by specific performance contexts. Therefore, it is important to be familiar with the practices that were in use at the

composer's intended time and place of performance. In the case of Lassus's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* (as was stated earlier), the best evidence available suggests that it was written as a gift of private music for Albrecht V's court in Munich. Therefore, it is those performing circumstances that can inform a performance today.

When Lassus first came to Munich, he was one of several new Flemish singers being brought to the court. Considering this fact, and Lassus's own background, the pronunciation of the Latin text could potentially be shaded by mid-sixteenth-century Dutch pronunciation. The pertinent simplified pronunciation rules in this case would be as follows:²⁸

Consonants:

- C: before E, I: [tj]; otherwise: [k]
- G: before E, I: [ʒ]; otherwise: [x]
- S: between vowels within a word: [z]; otherwise: [s]
- SC before E, I: [tj]
- X, XC: before a vowel: [kz]; otherwise: [ks]

Vowels:

- A: in closed syllables: [ɑ]; in open syllables: [a:]
- E: in closed syllables: [ɛ]; in open syllables: [e:]
- I: in closed syllables: [i]; in open syllables: [i:]
- O: in closed syllables: [ɔ]; in open syllables: [o:]
- U: [y]

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VIII. Phrygia

Ipsa Deum vidi summum, ulti volentem
Mundi homines stupidos, et pectora caeca, rebellis.
Et quia sic nostram complerent crimina pellem,
Virginis in corpus voluit demittere coelo
Ipse Deus prolem, quam nunciet Angelus almae
Matri, quo miseros contracta sorde levaret.

IX. Europaea

Virginis aeternum veniet de ulti s verbum
Purum, qui valles et montes transiet altos.
Ille volens etiam stellato missus Olympo,
Edetur mundo pauper, qui cuncta silenti
Rexerit imperio : sic credo, et mente fatebor :
Humano ulti st divino semine gnatus.

X. Tyburtina

Verax ipse Deus dedit haec mihi munia fandi,
Carmine quod sanctam potui monstrare puellam,
Concipiet quae Nazareis in finibus, ilium
Quem sub carne Deum Bethlemica rura videbunt.
O nimium felix, coelo dignissima mater,
Quae tantam sacro lactabit ab ubere prolem.

XI. Erythraea

Cerno Dei natum, qui se demisit ab alto,
Ultima felices referent cum tempora soles:
Hebraea quem virgo feret de stirpe decora,
In ulti s multum teneris passurus ab annis,
Magnus erit tamen hic divino carmine vates,
Virgine matre satus, prudenti pectore verax.

XII. Agrippa

Summus erit sub carne satus, charissimus atque,
Virginis et verae complebit viscera sanctum
Verbum, consilio, sine noxa, spiritus almi:
Despectus ulti stamen ille, salutis amore,
Arguet et nostra commissa piacula culpa :
Cuius honos constans, et gloria certa manebit.

VIII. Phrygia

I myself saw the high God wishing to punish the stupid men
of the earth and the blind heart of the rebel.
And because crimes shall thus fill our skin,
God himself wished to send from heaven into the body
of a virgin his son, which the angel shall announce to the fostering
mother, so that he may raise the wretches from the uncleanness
they have contracted.

IX. Europaea

From the body of a virgin shall come forth the pure
word eternal, who shall cross valleys and high mountains.
He, willingly sent even from starry Olympus,
will be sent into the world a pauper, who shall rule all creation
with silent power. Thus I believe and shall acknowledge in my heart:
He is the child of both divine and human seed.

X. Tyburtina

The truthful God himself gave me these gifts of prophecy,
that I might proclaim in song the holy virgin
who shall conceive in Nazareth's bounds
that God whom Bethlehem's lands shall see in the flesh.
O most happy mother, worthy of Heaven,
who shall nurse such a child from her holy breast.

XI. Erythraea

I behold the son of God, who sent himself from on high,
when the joyful days shall bring the last times.
He whom the comely virgin shall bear from the Hebrew lineage,
he who shall suffer much on earth from his tender years on,
he shall nevertheless be here a great seer in godly prophecy,
the son of a virgin mother, truthful and of a wise heart.

XII. Agrippa

The highest and dearest shall be born in the flesh the son
of the true virgin, and the holy word shall fill the womb
of the maiden through the pure intention of the nurturing spirit;
although contemptible to many, he, for love of our salvation,
will censure the sins committed by our guilt;
his honor shall remain constant and his glory certain.

ing of pronunciation would be in the direction of the "Classical" Latin of Cicero, which was the literary language of the Empire circa 100 B.C.E. until about halfway through the first century C.E. There were some instances of humanistic Renaissance-era revivals of this pronunciation. In each case, however, it is ambiguous which rules would have been observed, and therefore specific performance recommendations are difficult to determine.²⁹

The performing forces at Albrecht V's court chapel varied widely, depending upon his fortunes. Members of the Kapelle provided music for Mass, Vespers, and Vigils, in addition to music for meals and relaxation times. In a 1586 performance of Brumel's twelve-part *Missa 'Et ecce terrae motus,'* 45 singers were specifically noted as having participated, including 12 boys singing

the three cantus lines.³⁰ This performance took place when the Kapelle was at its largest, and was intended for a prestigious performance of a sacred work. Albrecht V was also known (and criticized) for his love of musical display.³¹ Because the *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* does not specifically fit into the liturgy, and Albrecht V also enjoyed private performances, it is likely that the number of performers per part would have been slightly smaller than the Brumel forces of 1586, possibly only two or three performers on each line. Add to this evidence the fact that the extant manuscripts contain only one partbook for each part, and the possibility of larger forces seems unlikely.

Concerning issues of ornamentation, local traditions are harder to trace, so cues must be taken from widely consulted contemporary treatises. Because of the soloistic

nature of the performing forces, it is possible that figures/graces and divisions/diminutions could have been used.³² However, the highly chromatic, generally triadic style of this par-



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ticular piece might have led performers to minimize such ornamentation, in favor of harmonic clarity.³³

The idea of tempo at this time was closely bound up with the *tactus*, or the larger temporal unit. The *tactus* was generally regarded as moving at the pace of a healthy heartbeat. Another common comparison was with a steady walking stride.³⁴ In other words, the longer units dictated tempo, and that tempo would be approximately 55–70 beats per minute. Tempi could be flexible though, and varied to reflect mood.³⁵

Intonation is a performance issue difficult to address, because of the modern dominance of equal temperament. The system in use for voices and other flexible-tuning instruments at the time was just intonation, in which all fifths and major thirds were tuned pure.³⁶ Practically, this means that it

will be difficult to rehearse with a keyboard instrument, because a pitch will not always be the same, depending on where it lies in the vertical musical space.

The pitch level at which music from the mid-sixteenth century was performed is an even thornier issue. Broadly speaking, vocal polyphony was written in two combinations of clefs: "high clefs" (G2, C2, C3, F3), and "low clefs" (C1, C3, C4, F4). There was no universal pitch standard, so pitch level was determined by any accompanying instruments, or by the ranges of the vocalists. In particular, many theorists called for a downward transposition of pieces appearing in the "high clefs" configuration.³⁷ *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* contains pieces in both clef combinations, with an additional even lower third set (high: III, IV, VII, VIII; low: Prologue, I, II, V, VI, XI, XII; extra-low: IX, X).

Ideal vocal timbre for this repertoire is also difficult to pinpoint, primarily because of the inadequate descriptive vocabulary available then and now. It is generally accepted based upon Renaissance descriptions, however, that vocal timbre should be light but clear, with pure tone and expressive force.³⁸

These performance conditions are not intended to discourage modern performances that are governed by modern expectations. The purpose of this explication is to guide thinking about the piece, rather than constrict it. The most important concept is the relative flexibility of performance at this time, as compared to modern thinking.³⁹

Conclusion

The *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* of Orlande de Lassus is a beautiful piece to hear performed.

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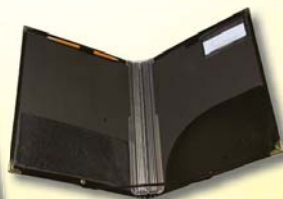
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The harmonic language is unexpected and striking, and the texts are dense, allusive, and multi-layered. Unfortunately, there is a perception of the piece as an object more interesting for study than performance. This idea is reinforced by the very esotericism of the harmonies and texts which have the potential to engage listeners in a performance setting. It is hoped that the above exploration of the biographical and historical context of *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*, together with the analysis and exploration of the text and music, and the proposal of historically informed performance methods, will lead to a reconsideration of this piece. It is a work as appealing as Lassus's other more commonly sung motets, and is ripe for performance by any group searching for repertoire from this period.

On the other hand, this demystification should be, in no way, interpreted as a dismissal of the mystic character of the composition. Quite the opposite: any effective performance would need to highlight that character; in order to do *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* the full justice it deserves, and that Lassus no doubt envisioned.

NOTES

- ¹ Marjorie A. Roth. "The voice of prophecy: Orlando di Lasso's Sibyls and Italian Humanism." (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2005.), 9.
- ² Peter Bergquist. "The Poems of Orlando di Lasso's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* and Their Sources." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, no. 3 (Autumn, 1979), 516.
- ³ Karol Berger. *Theories of Chromatic and Enharmonic Music in Late Sixteenth Century Italy*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1976), 118.
- ⁴ Bergquist, 516.
- ⁵ Gustave Reese. *The New Grove High Renaissance Masters: Josquin, Palestrina, Lassus, Byrd, Victoria*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 157.
- ⁶ Roth, 23.
- ⁷ Reese, 158.
- ⁸ Roth, 23.
- ⁹ Reese, 160.
- ¹⁰ Jessie Ann Owens. "Review." *Notes* 48, No. 4 (Jun., 1992): 1442.
- ¹¹ Bergquist, 520.
- ¹² Karol Berger. "Tonality and Atonality in the Prologue to Orlando di Lasso's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*: Some Methodological Problems

- in *Analysis of Sixteenth-Century Music.* *The Musical Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (Oct., 1980): 492.
- ¹³ Reese, 160.
- ¹⁴ Roth, 9.
- ¹⁵ Roth, 42.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.
- ¹⁸ Bergquist, 523.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 529
- ²⁰ Berger, *Tonality and Atonality*, 489.
- ²¹ Karol Berger. "The Common and the Unusual Steps of Musica ficta: A Background for the Gamut of Orlando di Lasso's *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*." *Revue belge de Musicologie/ elgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 39 (1985 - 1986): 73.
- ²² James Haar. "False Relations and Chromaticism in Sixteenth-Century Music." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30, no. 3 (Autumn, 1977): 392.
- ²³ Berger, "The Common and the Unusual Steps," 73.
- ²⁴ Roth, 26.
- ²⁵ Horst Leuchtmann. "Correct and Incorrect Accentuation in Lasso's Music: On the Implied Dependence on the Text in Classical Vocal Polyphony." *Orlando di Lasso Studies*. Ed. Peter Bergquist. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 245.
- ²⁶ Owens, 1441.
- ²⁷ Berger, "The Common and the Unusual Steps," 72.
- ²⁸ Timothy J. McGee. *Singing Early Music: The Pronunciation of European Languages in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*.

- (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 284.
- ²⁹ Harold Copeman. *Singing in Latin*. (London: Harold Copeman, 1990), 6.
- ³⁰ Clive Wearing. "Orlandus Lassus (1532-94) and the Munich Kapelle." *Early Music* 10, no. 2 (Apr., 1982), 150.
- ³¹ Reese, 161.
- ³² Steven Eric Plank. *Choral Performance: A Guide to Historical Practice*. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 86.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ³⁴ Brenda Smith. *Cantare et sonare: A Handbook of Choral Performance Practice*. (Chapel Hill: Hinshaw Music, 2006), 200.
- ³⁵ Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie. *Performance Practice: Music Before 1600*. (London: Macmillan, 1989), 126
- ³⁶ Jeffery T. Kite-Powell. *A Performer's Guide to Renaissance Music*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 287.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 295.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ³⁹ Peter Phillips. "Great Men Think Alike? On the 400th Anniversary of His Death, Peter Phillips Re-Assesses the Work of Orlandus Lassus." *The Musical Times* 135, No. 1816 (Jun., 1994): 363.
- ⁴⁰ Bergquist, 532.



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