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Discantare Super Planum Cantum : new approaches to vocal polyphonic improvisation 1300-1470

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Citation

Berentsen, N. M. T. (2016, December 14). *Discantare Super Planum Cantum : new approaches to vocal polyphonic improvisation 1300-1470*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45012>

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Author: Berentsen, Niels

Title: Discantare Super Planum Cantum : new approaches to vocal polyphonic improvisation 1300-1470

Issue Date: 2016-12-14

Discantare Super Planum Cantum

New Approaches to Vocal Polyphonic Improvisation
1300-1470

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van

de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden

op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties

te verdedigen op woensdag 14 december 2016

klokke 13.45 uur

door

Niels Berentsen

geboren te 's-Gravenhage (NL)

in 1987

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Dit proefschrift is geschreven als een gedeeltelijke vervulling van de vereisten voor het doctoraatsprogramma docARTES. De overblijvende vereiste bestaat uit een demonstratie van de onderzoeksresultaten in de vorm van een artistieke presentatie.

Het docARTES programma is georganiseerd door het Orpheus Instituut te Gent.

In samenwerking met de Universiteit Leiden, de Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag, het Conservatorium van Amsterdam, de Katholieke Universiteit Leuven en het Lemmensinstituut.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Improvising polyphony is by definition a collective undertaking, and it is first and foremost the people with whom I have sung together over the years that I wish to thank: my friends and fellow-improvisers Oscar Verhaar, Alejandra Wayar Soux, Benjamin Jago Larham, Santo Militello and João Luís Paixão—to name but a few—as well as my students. Without their voices, musicianship, perseverance and patience this research would not have been possible.

My thanks also go to the supervisory team that has helped me take on this project: to my promoter Prof. Frans de Ruiter, for his efficient managing of the process and helping hand in organisational matters. To my technical supervisor Gérard Geay, not only for his original and inspiring insights into medieval music, but also for his constant support throughout the project. To Dr. Fabrice Fitch, my academic supervisor, for his critical scrutiny of my ideas and writing style. To my artistic supervisor Stratton Bull, for his ideas and advice on linking research and performance practice.

I am grateful for the generous financial support of Stichting De Zaaier for my research. Also, I would like to thank the cultural department of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Moscow for financing my lecture and workshop at the Russian Gnessin's Academy of Music in 2012. The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague—my employer—I wish to acknowledge for its financial and logistic support. In particular I would like to thank Suzanne Konings (head of the Department Music Theory), Johannes Boer (head of the Department of Early Music), and Martijn Padding (head of the Department of Composition) for giving me the opportunity to develop a new approach to teaching counterpoint and improvisation. The Orpheus Institute, its director Peter Dejans, and its staff—Heike Vermeire and Jonas Tavernier in particular—I thank for making Ghent a 'home away from home'. Likewise, I wish to thank the staff of the House of Polyphony (Alamire Foundation, KU Leuven) and its director Bart Demuyt for the warm welcome in Leuven on several occasions.

Heartfelt thanks go to the following colleagues and their institutions for having invited me, and given me an opportunity to present my research: The late Prof. Zoya Ivanovna Glyadechkina (Russian Gnessin's Academy of Music,

Moscow), Dr. Alon Schab (University of Haifa), Prof. Dr. Felix Diergarten (Schola Cantorum Basiliensis), Dr. Massimiliano Guido (University of Pavia), Dr. Thérèse de Goede (Conservatory of Amsterdam), Hans van Regenmortel (Musica, Impulse Centre for Music, Neerpelt), Dr. Jed Wentz (Utrecht Early Music Festival), Dr. László Norbert Nemes (Kodály Institute of the Liszt Academy of Music, Kecskemét), Dr. Jason Stoessel (University of New England), and Dr. Marlon Titre (Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts, Tilburg).

My thanks also go to the following individuals for the insights shared in conversation and correspondence on pedagogical and scholarly matters: Sasha Zamler-Carhart, Isaac Alonso de Molina (Royal Conservatoire of The Hague), Rita Dams (Royal Conservatoire of The Hague), Jacques Meegens (Centre d'Études Supérieures Musique et Danse, Poitou-Charentes), Prof. Dr. Peter Schubert (McGill University, Montreal), Catherine Motuz (McGill University, Montreal), David Mesquita (Schola Cantorum Basiliensis), Prof. Dr. Philippe Canguilhem (University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès), Dr. Jérémie Couleau (University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès), Dr. Marina Toffetti (University of Padua), Dr. Hendrik Vanden Abeele and Dr. Giuseppe Fiorentino (University of Cantabria). I would also like to offer collective thanks to the members of the 'Ars Antiqua', 'Ars Nova', and 'Aetas Aurea' facebook groups, who have provided me with invaluable information and opportunities for discussion.

On a personal level my gratitude goes chiefly to my partner Małgorzata Grosbart, for her love and support, but also for providing a close-at-hand example of what excellence in research looks like. I wish to thank my parents, Oda Kok and Willie Berentsen, for always having encouraged me—but never pushed—to study music. My friend Jeromos Kamphuis I would like to thank for our many stimulating conversations about life and the arts, as well as giving me access to his fine collection of ardent spirits.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY, TRANSCRIPTIONS AND CITATIONS

Because this research is concerned with vocal music, conceived of without the notion of a pitch standard, all notes and note-names represent approximate, relative pitches. Note names are given in Helmholtz pitch notation (e.g. *c'* for middle *c*). Italicised capitals (e.g. *F*) represent pitch classes. Historical note names (e.g. 'Gsolreut' for *g*) or solmisation syllables may be used as part of a historical quotation or discussion. Note values are called by their British names, also in discussing mensural notation (e.g. breve for *brevis*). Intervals are given in English (e.g. fifth for *diatessaron* or *quinta*), unless part of an original language quotation. Interval progressions—for instance: third to unison—are given in the following form: 3-1. Three-voice sonorities—for instance a first inversion triad—are indicated as follows: 3/5. If needed, upper and lowercase m's are used to indicate major and minor imperfect consonances (e.g. M3-5 means: major third to fifth).

The musical examples in this dissertation fall into three main categories: transcriptions of historical compositions and treatise-examples, demonstrative examples, and transcriptions of improvisations.

The historical examples have been transcribed from images of their manuscript or printed sources (facsimile editions, digital pictures or microfilms), unless otherwise indicated. References to a recommended modern, scholarly edition are provided in a footnote. References to digital or printed facsimiles used for transcription are given in the bibliography together with the sources. All examples are given in modern clefs (F4 and G2). Ligatures are indicated with horizontal closed brackets. Broken horizontal brackets indicate coloration. Manuscript accidentals are given within the staff, using $\sharp$ for the *diesis* or 'mi-sign' and $\flat$ for the 'fa-sign'. (See also Glossary, 'musica ficta'). Accidentals above the staff or between parentheses are editorial. Reconstructed music is placed between vertical square brackets. Chant and polyphony notated without a clear rhythm has been transcribed in semibreves. If notated on a single staff, filled notes represent the second voice, open semibreves the tenor. The fourteenth-century mensural examples in Chapter 3 have been transcribed at various levels of reduction, corresponding to those of the referenced editions. This is in order

to facilitate comparison and to accommodate for the many different, regional variants of fourteenth-century mensural notation. The fifteenth-century mensural examples in Chapter 4 have been transcribed retaining the original note-values, unless otherwise indicated. Improvisations (e.g. Example 2.20) have been transcribed from recordings, notating only rhythm and relative pitch. The notated pitch reflects the mode of the cantus firmus, not the performance pitch. In metric improvisations, the semibreve represents the beat. Sung accidentals are given within the staff. The names of the participants are given in square brackets above the parts. For demonstrative examples (e.g. Example 2.2) the same conventions are used.

The texts cited in this dissertation likewise fall into three categories: lyrics of musical examples, passages from historical treatises, and quotations from modern, scholarly publications.

The lyrics and titles of historical pieces are given in the original spelling of the sources (e.g. 'deo gracias' instead of 'deo gratias'). Similarly, part-names are given in their original forms (e.g. superius instead of soprano). Lyrics in transcriptions of improvised polyphony are given in the spelling of the *Graduale Triplex*. Quotations from historical theoretical texts are given in English translation in the body of the text, with the original in a footnote. Not all treatises could be studied from facsimile, titles and quotations from treatises, therefore, follow the spelling of their modern editions. In citations from modern English scholarly texts the spelling of the original is retained. Foreign language quotations are given in translation in the body of the text, with the original in a footnote. Unless otherwise indicated, the authors cited are historical musicologists.

GLOSSARY

Cantare super librum (Lat.): ‘singing on the book’, an expression used by Johannes Tinctoris to describe performances of non-written counterpoint. The term takes its origin from the chant book, *liber cantus*, which supplied the cantus firmus for such performances.

Cantus (Lat.): ‘song’, when used as a part-name it refers to the upper voice of a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century polyphonic composition.

Cantus firmus (Lat.): ‘firm song’, a plainchant melody. In modern usage it indicates a chant, often in long values, undergoing polyphonic treatment. See also ‘cantus prius factus’.

Cantus prius factus (Lat.): a pre-existing tune, either sacred or secular, which forms the basis for a polyphonic composition or improvisation. See also ‘cantus firmus’.

Clausula (Lat.): ‘cadence’, the progression from an imperfect sonority to a perfect one in stepwise contrary motion, often at the close of a musical phrase. In a two-voice cadence (e.g. 6-8 or 3-5), one voice makes an upward stepwise soprano clausula (*cantizans*), and the other a downward stepwise tenor clausula (*tenorizans*). Three-voice cadences can be formed by doubling the soprano clausula at the lower fourth or upper fifth, producing the so-called double leading tone cadence (3/6-5/8 or 6/10-8/12). In the later fifteenth century other standardised cadential functions appear: The bass clausula (*bassizans*) is formed by 5-1 below the tenor, and the alto clausula (*altizans*) by 4-5 or 5-3 above it. See also ‘musica ficta’.

Color (Lat.): see ‘isorhythm’.

Contrappunto alla mente (It.): an expression used for improvised counterpoint by Italian sixteenth-century authors such as Nicola Vicentino and Gioseffo Zarlino. Tinctoris already classified *cantare super librum* as a ‘mental’ activity.

Contrapunctus (Lat.): ‘counterpoint’, a term for polyphony dating from the mid-fourteenth century. In a strict sense it refers to note-against-note-counterpoint, ‘punctus contra punctum’, the placement of one note against another in polyphony.

Contratenor (Lat.): a voice ‘against the tenor’, enriching the tenor-cantus duet.

Fourteenth-century mobile contratenores mostly occupy the same range as the tenor. A special instance is the fauxbourdon-contratenor, which runs in parallel with the cantus or superius. In the late fifteenth-century contratenors specialise, either as a ‘low contratenor’ (*contratenor bassus*) or a ‘high contratenor’ (*contratenor altus*).

Discantus (Lat.): ‘singing apart’, a term for polyphony used between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. It is employed here to denote fourteenth- and early-fifteenth century polyphony based primarily on contrary motion.

Discantus / Contrapunctus floridus (Lat.): ‘florid discant or counterpoint’, terms referring to rhythmically varied polyphony, in which the note-against-note counterpoint has been ‘broken up’ into smaller values.

Fixed do solfa: a modern system of sight-reading, practised mainly in Romance-language countries, in which solmisation syllables represent fixed, absolute pitches (e.g. ‘do’ is *C*). ‘Solfa’ is used here for modern, seven-note variants of this practice, ‘solmisation’ for historical techniques. See also ‘hexachordal solmisation’ and ‘moveable do solfa’.

Guidonian hand: a pedagogic aid for training singers, credited to—but probably not invented by—Guido of Arezzo. It is mental map, in which the notes of the medieval Gamut (G-e’’) are projected on the joints and finger-tips of the singer’s left hand. See also ‘hexachordal solmisation’.

Hexachordal solmisation: a system of sight-reading, practised between the eleventh and the eighteenth centuries, credited to Guido of Arezzo. This system made use of six syllables or *voces musicales* (ut, re, mi, fa, sol, and la) known as a hexachord. Hexachords would be placed on *C*, *G* and *F*, thereby obtaining all the pitches of the Gamut. See also ‘musica recta’.

Hoquetus (Lat.): ‘hocket’, a musical technique, used in polyphonic compositions between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, in which a single melody is shared between different voices. The term seems to originate from ‘hoquet’, the French for hiccup, because of the abrupt silences in each of the parts which result from this technique.

Improvisation model: used here to identify a technique producing a particular polyphonic texture, such as fauxbourdon, gymel or discant in adjacent

consonances. Similar concepts exist for later music in the form of 'Satzmodelle' (Ger.) or 'schemata'.

Isorhythm: a term coined by musicologist Friedrich Ludwig indicating the periodic repetition of rhythmic and melodic sequences in compositions from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, especially in tenor parts. In modern parlance, *talea* refers to a repeated string of rhythmic values, *color* to a repeated melody.

Locus communis (Lat.): 'commonplace', from the Greek 'topoi', an element of a linguistic or musical idiom which is the common property of all its users. Historically these elements were collected in 'common place books', or stored in the memory, to facilitate extemporisation.

Mensural notation: umbrella-term for the musical notations used for writing polyphony between ca. 1200 and 1600. Its historical, theoretical designations, *cantus figuralis* and *musica mensurabilis*, set it apart from plainchant notation, in which notes were not 'measurable' and—in principle—supposed to be of equal length.

Moveable do solfa: modern system of sight-reading, practised for instance in Kodály pedagogy, in which solmisation-syllables apply to scale-degrees rather than fixed pitched (e.g. 'do' for *G* as the tonic in G-major). See also 'fixed do solfa' and 'hexachordal solmisation'.

Musica ficta (Lat.): 'fictive music', notes outside of the basic medieval Gamut. Not to be confused with editorial accidentals in modern editions of medieval music, which also include *musica recta*. These notes were in use for two principal reasons: the marking of cadences with a 'leading tone' (*causa pulchritudinis*), and the correction of tritones and diminished fifths (*causa necessitatis*). Even so, musical scribes very rarely indicated such 'accidentals', and the use of *musica ficta* was part of the singer's craft. See also 'musica recta' and Section 3.1.4.

Musica recta (Lat.): 'real music', the notes of the medieval Gamut, which could be sung on one of the three basic hexachords. These are all the diatonic pitches as well as *B-flat*. See also 'hexachordal solmisation'.

Oral tradition: a form of communication in which knowledge, artistic and cultural ideas are transmitted by word of mouth from one generation to the next.

Organum (Lat.): used here to identify either ‘parallel organum’, the singing in parallel perfect consonances, or *organum purum*, the florid, unmeasured organum practiced for instance by the Notre Dame School.

Progression: used here either as a ‘dyadic progression’, the progression of one interval to the next (e.g. 5-6), or as the succession between two multi-voice sonorities, analogous to a ‘chord progression’ in later music (e.g. 8/5-3/5).

Resfacta (Lat.): ‘made thing’, a term used by Johannes Tinctoris to indicate a notated ‘piece’ of polyphony. See also ‘cantare super librum’.

Simple polyphony: a repertoire of largely homophonic polyphony from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, often—but not always—written in plainchant neumes or ‘mixed’ notations, using elements from both chant, and mensural notation.

Species counterpoint: a method of teaching counterpoint through a number of stages or *species* with an increasing number of notes of the counterpoint for every note of the tenor. This method was so named by Johann Joseph Fux in the eighteenth century, but had—in different varieties—already been in use since the late fifteenth century.

Superius (Lat.): ‘soprano’, a general fifteenth-century name for the upper part in a polyphonic composition. See also ‘cantus’.

Talea (Lat.): see ‘isorhythm’.

Tenor (Lat.): term indicating either the tenor-part of a polyphonic composition, or the *cantus prius factus* on top of which the polyphony is constructed. See also ‘cantus firmus’.