

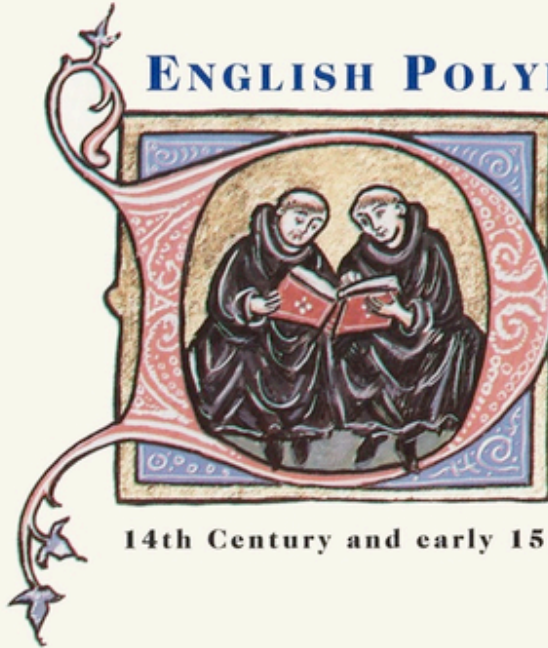


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LEMS 8006

ENGLISH POLYPHONY



Music of the
Middle Ages
Vol. 6

LEMS 8006

14th Century and early 15th Centuries

Russell Oberlin, *Countertenor*
Charles Bressler, *Tenor*
Robert Price, *Tenor*
Gordon Meyers, *Baritone*
Martha Blackman, *Viol*

(LEMS 8006)

English Polyphony
Music Of the Middle Ages Volume 6
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Paul Wolfe, *Organ*

English music of the late middle ages, though far less known than the Gothic structures where its harmonies first resounded, shares many of the features usually associated with contemporary art and architecture. It tends toward conservatism and independence, though it is not in itself afraid of innovation. It relishes a texture that is at once rich in light and sonority: when Simon Tunsted (in his late 14th century *Quatuor Principalia*) describes the way five singing men build up a harmonic edifice on a given plainsong, he reminds us of the Perpendicular triumphs of Canterbury, Gloucester, Winchester, Ripon, and a host of other cathedrals and abbeys. A sublime simplicity of structure was combined very often with an over-elaboration of detail, but this detail the Englishman just managed to keep in check, whereas the Frenchman “truncating the melodies with hockets and depraving them with discants” drew forth the censure of ecclesiastic and laymen alike.

Neither the decree of Pope John XXII nor the derision of Jacques de Liege affected the English to any great extent. Indeed, had the Belgian theorist listened to English singers he would never have accused them, as he did his own countrymen, of “barking and braying in the manner of dogs, and delighting like lunatics in disorderly and aimless hurrying to and fro”. The English composers had enjoyed their dissolute youth as early as the 11th century, when the great Winchester troper had been created, and ever since that time they have seized every conceivable opportunity to trope the Ordinary of the Mass. With almost embarrassing logic, they even troped tropes. The eleventh fascicle of the St. Andrews manuscript testifies to their continued endeavors, but the movement weakened only after one more century. By the time of the Old Hall Manuscript (1400-1425) only two tropes remain – the Gloria Spiritus et alme and the Marian form of Benedictus. Nevertheless, the forms and styles in both motets and Mass sections are varied enough to replace by their musical interest the bewilderment so frequently endangered through their texts.

During the later part of the 14th century, the influence of court and chapel royal became increasingly apparent in the world of art and music. Heraldic emblems and designs usurped the biblical figures, the liturgical motives, whose presence had pervaded European statuary for centuries. Similarly, motet texts referred to personal or political subjects, even though the tenor remained faithful to a more or less apposite liturgical cantus firmus. It is significant that the political motets in the Old Hall Manuscript are couched in the (for England) new isorhythmic style; the Marian antiphons, on the

other hand, retain the basic features of conductus style, with its single text, tendency toward homophony, and three-part harmony. In the following notes, an approximate date is given for each title, as well as indications of original source.

1. Kyrie Cuthberte (1390)

(Durham, Chapter Library A iii II). This troped Kyrie is written in an insular variant of Ars Nove notation, and was doubtless intended for use at High Mass on the Feast of St. Cuthbert (March 20). As a former Bishop of Durham, St. Cuthbert – whose shrine stands immediately to the east of the high altar – would be commemorated in especially lavish and splendid ritual. The unknown composer of this Kyrie has shown considerable dating in his use of accidentals, though from a structural point of view his music leans heavily on the fundamentally simple fauxbourdon style.

2. Kyrie (de angelis) 1375

(London, British Museum, Arundel Ms. 14). English discant, though it has stylistic affinities with fauxbourdon, is opposed to it in one important feature: the melody is in the lowest of the three voice-parts, whereas in strict fauxbourdon it is in the highest. This Kyrie, one of a set of six compiled perhaps for weekday Masses (when even in simple feasts Kyrie was allowed to be sung polyphonically) is a characteristic example of English discant. The melody now usually known as *de angelis* is heard in the lowest voice.

3. Kyrie (orbis factor) 1380

(Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Arch. Selden B 14). As the words of the trope do not appear, this Kyrie was intended to be sung on simple feasts of nine lessons, or of three lessons cum regimine chori. It has been taken from the binding of a Chaucer manuscript, and was originally part of an extensive polyphonic troper, now fragmentary and much damaged. The setting of invocations 1 (=3), 5, 7, and 9 pre-supposes alternatim performance. The melody is in the highest part, but there is no hint of fauxbourdon style. It is thus possible that English discant, fauxbourdon, and this third (free treble) style so much indebted to French models, were current in England at roughly the same time.

4. Gloria in excelsis 1400

(London, British Museum, Sloan Ms. 1210). From a set of flyleaves bound up with an early 15th century grammatical treatise, formerly in use at

Tattershall College in Lincoln shire. This Gloria is in fully-fledged fauxbourdon, yet there is no lack of ornament, especially toward the end, where the upper voice becomes increasingly florid. This upper voice seems to be freely based on Satum 3, one of the chants for Sundays throughout the year.

5. Sanctus and Benedictus 1380

(London, Public Record Office, E 149/7/23 dorse). This setting, together with 6 and 7, comes from an Inquisition post mortem, in roll form, which was used by musical scribes who had apparently gained employment in the Exchequer offices. The plainsong (Sarum 3) is in the middle voice throughout, and there are many stylistic similarities with the earliest layer of the Old Hall Manuscript. Note the Marian trope in “Benedictus Marian Filus qui venit...”, which also appears once in Old Hall.

6. Agnus Dei (same source as 5)

The fourth Agnus Dei setting on the roll: in this instance each of the three invocations has been separately composed. But 1 and 3 are illegible, therefore only the second invocation (Sarum 2) has been recorded here.

7. Agnus Dei (same source as 5)

This is the second invocation of the first Agnus Dei setting on the roll. The first invocation (also used for the third, with the change to “dona nobis pacem”) is impossible to transcribe owing to extensive damage to the parchment. The plainsong (Sarum 6) is in the middle voice.

All these compositions are taken from the same source: Old Hall (near Ware, Hertfordshire), St. Edmund’s College, Ms. Without shelfmark. The most thorough study of this source is in the second chapter of Manfred Bukofzer’s *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music*.

8. Cooke: Alma Proles Regia/Christe miles inclite/Ab Inimicis

The first figure refers to the volume, the second to the page, of the Plainsong and Medieval Society’s edition of the Old Hall Manuscript). A motet for use in the time of war, probably written between 1417 and 1420, when Henry V opened his campaign in Normandy. The tenor is taken from an optional part of the Rogationtide litany, to be sung only in wartime, while the upper voices beg for the intercession of St. George and of the Virgin Mary.

9. Thomas Damett: Salve virgo sacra parens (1,166)

A shortened version of a Marian sequence, probably written in France or Burgundy when Damett was a member of Henry V's chapel royal. The first verse is sung in unison, the second ("Salve porta") in polyphony, as is the closing acclamation "Mater Christi".

10. Leonel Power: Ave regina coelorum (1,151)

A conductus setting of a Marian antiphon, sung during procession in redeundo at Vespers of feasts in honour of the Virgin. This serene motet is probably an early work of Leonel's; he died at Canterbury in 1145, so this piece may well belong to the late 14th century.

11. Thomas Damett: Salvatoris mater/Sancte Georgi/Benedictus (III, 40)

The text of the upper voice is taken from a Sarum sequence, to which two verses have been added in order to mention King Henry V. His name also appears, linked with that of St. George, in the middle voice. The tenor of this motet is based on half a Benedictus, thus: "Benedictus Mariae Filius qui ve", the other half being used by Sturgeon in Salve mater Domini (item 7). Among the times which Damett left to this mother, in the will proved on April 14th, 1437, there is "a silver cup chased and covered with writing and "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini".

12. Cooke: Stella coeli (1,168)

A processional hymn beseeching the Virgin Mary for the protection against the plague, or the black death. The hymn was frequently set polyphonically in England up to the 16th century, and it was also well known on the continent of Europe. It is difficult not to associate the strangely chromatic modulations at the beginning with the subject of the hymn.

13. Thomas Damett: Beata Dei genitrix (1,164)

Duo and trio sections alternate in this conductus setting of an antiphon vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The final Alleluia shows that it was meant for use at Easter.

14. Nicholas Sturgeon: Salve mater/Salve templum/(n)it in nomine Domini (III, 51)

Linked by its tenor with 4, this motet has many points of resemblance with Damett's. The texts of both motets pray for deliverance in time of war and sickness; both are for two voices and organ; both use isorhythmic technique,

perhaps as a compliment to their French audience. Both composers were in France in 1416.

Dennis Stevens

Kyrie Cuthberte (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

Kyrie, wilt thou, Cuthberte, pray
For the blind; in the mud they stray. Eleyson.

What force the mire's trap sundereth?
What lets the light? Thy holy death. Eleyson.

Even still captive in the flesh,
We may perform his rite afresh. Eleyson.

Christe, who liveth after death,
Shield us from all that endangereth. Eleyson.

Suppress the demon, source of strife,
And grant the worthy an after-life. Eleyson.

Save this throng by Thy holy Will,
For sin maketh their groaning shrill. Eleyson.

These sheep of our patron Shepard,
This flock that would move by They Word, Eleyson.

Is Thy servant praised as behooved?
Then as a father Thou art moved, Eleyson.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of goodwill. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks for thy great glory, O Lord God, King of Heaven; O God, Father All Powerful; O Lord, Only Begotten son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, Who takest away the sins of the world; Hear our prayer, Who sittest at the right hand of the Father. Have mercy upon us, since Thou alone art holy, Thou alone art most high, Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Sanctus and Benedictus (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed be the son of Mary, Who cometh in the name of the lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Agnus Dei (Oberlin, Bressler, Mysers)

Lamb of God

Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.

Cooke: Alma Proles Regia/Christi Miles Inclite/Ab Inimicis (Oberlin, Bressler, Wolfe)

Full of all grace, Governess,
We of the world serve Thee,
Even Thou, Heaven's Empress,
Child of authority.

Grace as a river floweth,
And mercy floods the earth;
Such blessings Thou bestoweth
Through miraculous birth.

Yet we shall die wretchedly,
And in sin we shall drown,
O Mother of Piety,
Lest Thy mercy come down!

Wilt Thou obtain our pardon,
And through thy pious prayer,
Grant us that true contribution
Gain us a life more fair.

What shall we do without Thee?
We shall be overrun;
We shall perish utterly
With thy oblivion.

Thy pieth knoweth not
How to refuse Thy aid,
Nor have the humble forgot
How thou are surely swayed.

O Mother of Our Savior,
Bountiful in goodness!
Secure is Thy petitioner
Who comes in faithfulness!

She to Whom we pray forseeth
Our customary needs,
Even as she limiteth
Our grief as it proceeds.

In the sight of the Father,
Jesus, we call to Thee;
We, the servants of Thy Mother,
We, whom Thou has set free,

We, to whom Thou dost grant
To know great majesty,
Even Thine own, dominant
Throughout eternity.

O illustrious soldier,
George, holiest officer,
 The model of Christ's army:
Now among the imparters
Of light, the chorus of martyrs,
 Shineth thy sanctity.

Thou mayest pray for anything
And secure it for the king,
 So far obtaineth merit;
Serve then the cause of England,
Lest the kingdom fall, ill-mannered;
 Unworthy are we, unfit.

That the Mother of All Grace
Shelter all the populace,
 Secure Her sovereign mercy;
Show her the disaffected,
That the king be protected
 From whatever enemy.

Model of virgins, refuge
Of the king, no subterfuge
 Concealeth what he doeth;
Virgin, keep him in Thy arms
As his enemies in swarms
 Fail in breathing battle breath.

Guide Thou the column of gold
At whose base may peace unfold
 In our time, unaltering;
In life grant him victories
And after death the glories
 That heaven holds for a king.

Thomas Damett: Salve Virgo Sacra Parens (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

Hail, Mother of the Word, Virgin
Thou above all other women,
 Thou, mother by virgin birth;
Thou of the immaculate womb,
Even Thou, O Maiden, through Whom
 The Savior came down to earth.

Thy house of solace is prepared.
For all whom sin has not impaired,
 Thou, the Gate of Paradise!
Raise up to the palace of heaven
Those who in faithful jubilation
 Are mindful of Thy device:
 MATER CHRISTI.

Leonel Power: Ave Regina Coelorum (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

O Queen of Heaven, hail to Thee!
Thou Whom the angels call Lady,
Hail, Sacred Root, may we
Walk in the Light that arose from Thee.

Hail! Thou the glorious!
Hail! Thou of beauty marvelous!
Hail! Thou of exceeding wondrous!
Hail, and to Christ forever implore for us.

Thomas Damett: Salvatoris Mater/Sancte Georgi/Benedctus (Oberlin,
Bressler, Myers)

Thou, O Savior's Mother, holy,
Mary, hope of high and lowly,
 Who first and last are graceful!
God's very temple, heaven's gate,
Seaport sure where may congregate
 The lost ships of the sinful.

To the highest King a counterpart
And wife, for whose merciful heart,
 Kindness is ever They name.
Both Martha and Mary Thou art
To the naked: Thou bidst depart
 The ills of the blind and the lame.

Thou, a flower upon a thorn tree,
Through the grace of Thy piety,
 Pleased the Flower of Flowers.
Without man, in virginity,
The King of Kings was born to Thee,
 Through Thee the Word of Powers
Be mindful of Henry the King,
For his sake Thy son beseeching.
 Pious Guardian of the Fold,
Flesh is heavy, an exiling;
At his death, o let Henry spring
 To heaven where he is enrolled.

O Queen of our King and our queen,
Pray to Thy Son, though we are mean,
 That our ruin be averted;
Let us be reborn and made clean,
And let us rule, O Queen, our Queen,
 Let Thy rule through us be asserted.

Thou, Saint George, whom God holdeth dear,
Ask the Savior our prayer to hear,
 that He rule over England.
Grant also, as it doth appear
Through thee the race of God is near,
 That our theme of praise may expand.

Thou our patron and advocate,
Defend the English and remonstrate
 Against enemy attack;
By the holy prayers deprecate,
Secure the people of the state
 Absence of war, of peace no lack.

Strong soldier, be near to our Henry,
And even, as in thy custody
 The people stand, counsel the King.
Hold thou forth against the enemy,
O invincible auxiliary;
 Arms, shield, and how thou shouldst bring.

As the sound of our singing swells,
Our hop is like that of the angels,
 Gloriously placed in thee.
Within thy holy citadels
Enduring peace, our patron, dwells;
 Such we pray England may be.

Cooke: Stella Coeli (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)
The Star of Heaven hath uprooted
The plague that killed like a sword,
Which man's first parent had implanted;

She, the Star Who suckled the Lord.

May She Who is that Star restrain
The other stars now at war,
Causing many deaths; may she deign
To keep death's awful canker far.

Thomas Damett: Beata Dei Genetris (Oberlin, Bressler, Myers)

O God's mother, Holy,
Blessed, blessed Mary!

The Holy Ghost's sanctuary!
Virgin for eternity!
Temple of the Lord!

Thou art alone, unequalled,
Thou, in Whom the Lord Jesus Christ was pleased.

O pray for the people,
Intervene for the clergy, Intercede for women
Who have become nuns. Alleluia.

Nicholas Sturgeon: Salve Mater/Salve Templum (N)It In Nomine Domini (Oberlin, Bressler, Wolfe)

Hail, Hope of Our salvation! Hail, Mother of the Lord,
Even He Whose death broke the yoke of our slavery;
Help us now in the time of our servitude on earth,
And raise us by the steps of virtue up unto heaven.

Hail to Thee, by Whose grace we have merited pardon,
By Whose grace we piously believe the Catholic faith;
By the merit of Thy holy prayers, O Holy Virgin,
Win back what Eve lost; Thou mayest re-establish it.

Hail, through Thee our piety, our belief in the Lord;
By Thy work we are worthy to be pardoned for our sins;
By Thy holy prayers, Mother, may help be granted us
To share the Kingdom of the Blessed even with Thy Son.

Hail, Temple of Sanctity! Hail, Temple of Holiness!
Temple of the Holy Spirit, Temple of Majesty!
Thou, Our Protectress, graciously save us,
We beseech Thee
That with the blessed we may share in the Kingdom worthily.

Virgin of Virgins, hail to Thee! Have mercy upon us!
See how our fainting souls are falling sick before us!
Heal our minds, the sources of sickness remove,
And let the Judge at His coming stretch forth His right hand to us.

Russell Oberlin, Thomas Hunter professor of music emeritus and director of the Collegium Musicum at Hunter College, is an internationally acclaimed singer widely recognized as America's foremost countertenor. A graduate of the Julliard School of music, Oberlin was a founding member of the legendary New York Pro Musica. He has recorded extensively, given recitals, and appeared as soloist with leading orchestras throughout this country and abroad. Operatic roles include appearances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where he sang the part of Oberon in the London premiere of Benjamin Britten's "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream." A senior Fullbright research scholar, Oberlin has taught and lectured extensively in the U.S. and England.

Cover Illustration, Lesley Anne Doyel
Cover, booklet art direction & design, Julia Lee Prospero
Original LP issue produced, Beverly Merrill
Recorded at Esoteric Sound Studios, NYC, Jerry Newman, eng.
Digital remastering & Reissue produced by Nick Fritsch
CD mastering, DSW Mastering Studios, NYC

Originally issued on the Experience Anonymes label in 1958 (catalog number EAS 31)



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