

Eric Jas, *Piety and Polyphony in Sixteenth-Century Holland: The Choirbooks of St Peter's Church, Leiden* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Press, 2018, 432 pp., ISBN 9781783273263).

The group of six mid-sixteenth-century choirbooks from the church of St Peter in Leiden is the most expansive collection of polyphonic compositions from the Low Countries preserved from the period. Although these sources have been known to specialists since the nineteenth century, the musicologist Eric Jas is the first to subject them to in-depth research. He took the choirbooks as the subject of his dissertation (1997) at Utrecht University, and now his research, updated and published in this book, is available to the international public. Jas starts from a thorough analysis of the choirbooks' contents and their codicological and paleographical features, positions his findings in their broader historical context, and presents readers with his interpretation of late medieval and early modern piety in the Netherlands as something impossible apart from the performance of music. Thanks to these rich sources, Jas also gives detailed attention to the schooling of the period and to musical life in urban environments. In so doing, he creates an important methodological framework that is neatly applicable to other regions of Latin Christendom, even those for which we have significantly fewer sources or no sources at all.

In the urban context, late medieval people's fear of purgatory and attempts to secure their souls' salvation after death manifested themselves in diverse forms of gifts to churches, corresponding in turn to an increase in liturgical practice. In the Netherlands, above all in its rich western regions, the existence of civic foundations called *zeven-getijdencolleges* (colleges of the seven canonical hours) is attested by Jas from the mid-fifteenth century onward. Their goal was to ensure the daily performance of the liturgy of the hours in parish churches. In his opening chapters, Jas summarizes the history of these institutions in different Dutch cities and sketches the intellectual atmosphere that motivated all human activity of the time. The *getijdencolleges* were also economic units that drew together professional singers and boys from Latin schools in order to provide the liturgy with high-level music-making. Music was not merely an aesthetic accompaniment or ornamentation of ritual, but rather an inseparable component and medium of the liturgical text: as a result, the liturgy would be unimaginable without it. Jas devotes detailed attention to the history of the *getijdencollege* of the church of St Peter in Leiden. Without an understanding of the reason and function of this institution, so the argument goes, it would be difficult to imagine who would expend so much effort in copying such a large amount of music at the middle of

the sixteenth century and why, especially when its performance demanded professional (that is, paid) singers.

An important figure of musical life in Leiden was the *zangmeester* (a teacher and the director of the school choir) Anthonius de Blauwe, who also appears in local records from 1547 onward as a scribe of musical manuscripts. His work included the systematically organized manuscript 1438 (1549) and manuscripts 1439 and 1440 (both from 1559).¹ He also contributed to the copying out of some parts of manuscript 1441. All of these choirbooks are in large format (54.5 by 40 centimetre). Manuscripts 1442 and 1443 are in folio size and are collections of individual sections with a less formal appearance, which is also the case with manuscript 1441. Another of the scribes who assisted in copying out the choirbooks was the composer Johannes Flamingus, whose name is connected to a total of 22 compositions in the Leiden choirbooks. Jas suggests that he could have been the composer and scribe of further compositions which, however, have not survived in any other sources.

Altogether, the Leiden choirbooks contain 328 different compositions on a wide spectrum of contemporary liturgical forms, from small-scale hymns to more sizable motets and responsoria, and up to extensive settings of the Mass ordinary. The breadth of the musical repertoire recorded in them covers the whole range of the works of composers working in northern France and the southern Low Countries during the first quarter of the sixteenth century. As might be expected, compositions by 'hit artists' of the time like Jacob Clemens non Papa and Thomas Crecquillon are predominant. Also present are numerous works by other significant composers which have not survived elsewhere. On the other hand, there is also the output of a mix of lesser-known composers with a purely local sphere of activity. Besides addressing individual musical forms, Jas considers their application in liturgies whose form and content can be reconstructed on the basis of the surviving compositions.

Piety and Polyphony in Sixteenth-Century Holland gives readers a new perspective on urban musical culture in the Low Countries, the musical repertoire utilised in this region, and the social background of music in the liturgy before the Reformation, which reached Leiden in 1572. The author puts the findings of his study of the choirbooks as a whole into the context of contemporary non-musical sources, which take us behind the scenes of municipal administration, musical performance, and the function of parish schools in Dutch cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. About half of the book's total 414 pages are taken up by extensive appendices that include careful summaries of critical editions of important historical documents with cross-references to translations into English, detailed codicological analyses of the six choirbooks, a thematic catalogue of all the compositions they contain, a list of concordant sources, a bibliography and an index. Jas'

1 All manuscripts from the collections of Leiden, Gemeentearchief. Manuscript 1440 is on

permanent display at Leiden in Museum De Lakenhal.

book is an exemplar of a modern, interdisciplinary monograph, thus offering findings on a special type of historical sources in such a way as to make them available for use by researchers from other fields of historical study. The book convincingly argues that that music, far from being a mere aesthetic appurtenance, was an inseparable element of the reality of the period.²

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