Guillaume Du Fay

Opera Omnia 01/20

Inclita stella maris

Edited by Alejandro Enrique Planchart



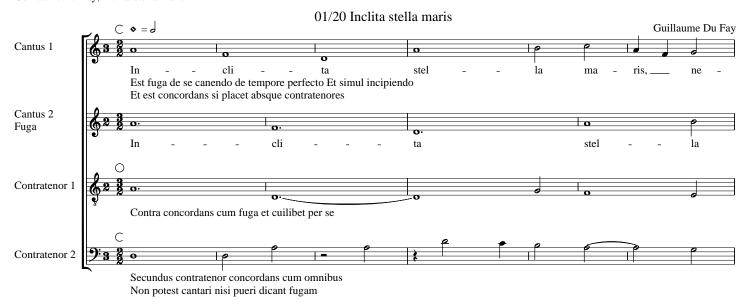
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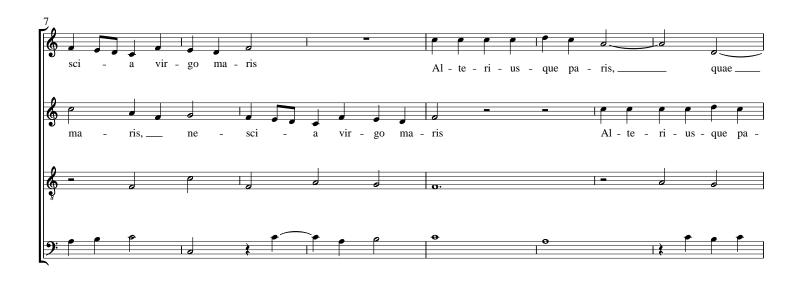
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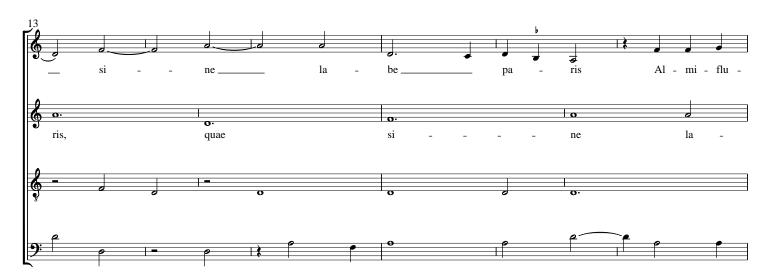
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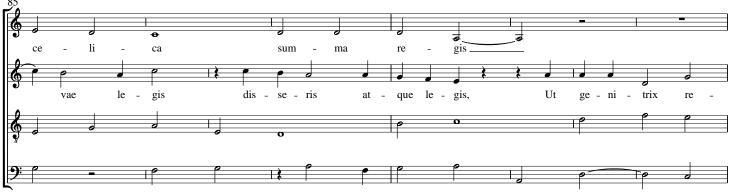




















01/20 Inclita stella maris

Source

Q15 (II), fols. A 211v-212r, R 195v-196r, M 208, "du fay." Full black notation with void coloration and flagged semiminims. Three notated voices: cantus 1, contratenor 1 and contratenor 2. Text in the cantus, no text at all in lower voices.

Canons and rubrics:

- 1 at end of cantus 1: Et fuga de se canendo de tempore perfecto et simul incipiendo et est concordans si placet absque contratenores.
- 2 at the start of Contratenor 1: Contra concordat cum fuga et cuilibet per se.
- 3 at the start of Contratenor 2: Secundus contratenor concordat cum omnibus, non potest cantare nisi pueri dicant fugam.

Clefs and mensurations

		1
Cantus 1	c2, six-line staff	\cap
Contratenor 1	c4	0
Contratenor 2	F3	\cup

Text

1	Inclita stella maris, nescia virgo maris	Renowned star of the sea, maid ignorant of man and of any other your peer
	Alteriusque paris, quae sine labe paris	that bears without stain, in bounteous wise, with succor for our tarrying,
	Almifluo more subveniendo more	relieving us from woe by Gabriel's "Hail."
	Nos revelans a vae per Gabrielis ave.	
2	Verbigenam solum, quem colit omne solum,	The Only Wordbegotten, whom all the earth worships, sharpening your
	In Sathanae collum tis acuendo collum,	distaff against Satan's neck, by the modest(?) beauty you rush into the
	Per decus ingenium proripis in genium,	spirit, whereat the mind is amazed, since it runs to old age.
	Quo stupet ingenium, cum fluat in senium.	
3	Schema novae legis disseris atque legis,	You declare and expound the form of the new law; as the King's mother
	Ut genitrix regis caelica summa regis	you rule the heavens above, commanding the angels and sitting above
	Praecipiens superis atque sedens super hiis	them; coercing the demons, restraining them by threats.
	Daemoniis dominans, hiis inhibendo minans:	
4	Quisque throno parent, hinc tibi vota parent	And hence let your throne's subjects ready their prayers for you to be
	Tis adigenda seris, quae bona tanta seris.	gathered by bolts(?), that strew so much good. When I become ash, I pray I
	Dum cinis eveniam, te precor inveniam,	may find that you are bringing me mercy from above, and that I may come
	Ferre mihi veniam desuper, ut veniam.	(to you).
	Amen.	Amen

Damage to the page has caused the loss of some notes of contratenor 2 in measures 81-86, but they can be reconstructed from bits of the noteheads and stems still visible as well as from photographs taken in the 1930s, which show the passage then under a semi-transparent paste-over.

The rubrics to the different voices appear to indicate four possible manners of performing the work:

- 1. A duet between cantus 1 and 2.
- 2. Cantus 1 and contratenor 1 (this is the least satisfactory possibility)
- 3. Cantus 1 and 2 and contratenor 1
- 4. All four voices.

The duet between cantus 1 and 2 is a self-sufficient mensural canon. The other voices provide a contrapuntal context that inflects the sonorities of the canon in subtle ways.

The scribe added a + like sign in the cantus at measure 95:3 and 103, and in both contratenors also at measure 103. The sign at 95:3 coincides in the derived voice with measure 103.

Besseler, with his obsession with hearing Du Fay as a forerunner of modern tonality, could find nothing good to say about this piece "with a monotonous predominance of d-minor tonality in 129 measures," and his comment has infected virtually every subsequent commentary of what is actually a lyrical and singularly euphonious work. Once we realize that Du Fay never thought of d minor nor of modern tonality and that his music is most certainly not the forerunner of it, we can hear the piece for what it is, a mensuration canon that plays with the motivic repetitions by reinflecting a number of the most important of such repetition (mostly cadential gestures) while avoiding cadences for much of its length. Modern day audiences who have found considerable beauty in the music of composers like Arvo Pärt and John Tavener probably will find much to like in this piece.

Besseler assumed that the work was very early simply because he disliked it. Its presence in Q15, phase 2, probably indicates it dates from the Roman years (1428-33), and in fact, although nowhere near as "showy" as the motet *Ecclesiae militantis*, it has some of the same melodic traits.

The text is a much too clever poem approaching a French tradition of *rime équivoquée*, where the same word with two different meanings, or combinations of words that produce the same syllables as a complete word used elsewhere in the poem are extensively used. The text in the manuscript is quite corrupt; here I follow the edition, emendations, and translation of Leofranc Holford-Strevens;² the only changes I have made are to use standard Latin spellings and modern non-liturgical English.

The motet also presents an interesting case for the use of *musica ficta*. Du Fay appears to have made an effort in writing the two contratenors not only to avoid a number of places where a *clausula vera* could happen (places where one or another of the cantus voices moves stepwise to the final), but to reinterpret the contrapuntal approach at a number of such cadences. A great deal of the ficta in the motet is not something that the singers would have gotten right, even with very good ears, on a first reading but rather on the second and third reading through the piece. The *musica ficta* suggested in the edition is intended essentially for a performance with all four voices. Some changes may be possible (or ever required by the rules of proper discant) with fewer voices. In this context the wording of the canon under the second contratenor, with its mention of *pueri*, might hold another clue to the *raison d'être* of the work. As voices are added to the basic mensuration canon in different combinations the *musica ficta* of the work becomes not only more complicated but more counter intuitive, as the contratenors interfere contrapuntally with what a singer of the cantus would normally do, so the piece might have been also intended to teach the choristers to "hear their way" through the increasingly complicated and problematic *musica ficta* world of the motet.

The tempo of this piece, even though it does not have very short note values, is probable a moderate semibreve going between MM 80 and 96, which would allow the motivic work to be heard as such and most of the phrases to be sung in one breath.

¹ Opera omnia, I, ix.

² Leofranc Holford-Strevens, "Du Fay the Poet? Problems in the Texts of his Motets," *Early Music History* 16 (1997), 120-21.