

EXPLANATION 1.9 : THE 13TH CENTURY: THE MEDIEVAL MOTET

1. THE MEDIEVAL MOTET

The motet (mot = word) is a polyphonic sacred or secular composition, derived from the organum and the conductus. "Motetus" meant two things: both the composition itself, and the text added in the duplum (the voice above the tenor, which was the lower voice). In a motet, the other voices, if any, were called triplum and quadruplum.

The motet was composed on an existing Gregorian chant that served as a base. Some mediaeval composers of motets were: Adam de la Halle, Leonin, Perotin and Guillaume de Machaut.

2. LATIN AND FRENCH MOTETS

The motets with texts in Latin (called Latin motets) and those with texts in French (called French motets) were developed at the same time during the 13th century. Both arised because texts were added to known melodies of discantus.

Some of these motets have a known Gregorian melody from the School of Notre Dame that had already been treated in polyphony, but other motets are based on songs that were not polyphonic. Today it is not known if some motets were based on polyphony that has been lost.

3. CONDUCTUS MOTET

This type of motet has the same text in all the voices superior to the tenor. Most of these motets are Latin, although there are some French. The conductus motet did not last long and probably disappeared because the composers saw that it was complicated to compose with all the voices with the same text, since all the sentences were required to be of equal length with an approximately equal number of notes.

4. POLITEXTUAL MOTET

In these motets each voice has a different text (polytextual). Thus, they are called double or triple motets according to the number of texts they have. Thus, a double motet (because it has 2 texts) has two voices called duplum and triplum, with two different texts. There was also another voice, the tenor voice (the lower voice). A double motet had, thus, three voices in total.

From the second half of the 13th century the double motets with three voices were the most used form. Some motets have several texts and also several languages at the same time, they are bilingual, but this practice was not widely accepted and did not last long. Most motets have different texts in the same language.

5. ENTÉ MOTET

These are motets in which texts and melodies, that probably originated as proverbs in the monophonic songs, had been inserted.

In some cases the whole text of a motet seems to be made of sayings, although, generally, the motets "enté" have the saying inserted at some place or places. It is also difficult to know if a motet is "enté" or not, since to know this the origin of the proverb must be known.

6. HOQUETUS MOTET

It is a kind of motet in which while one voice sings the other is silent. This alternation of rests produces a kind of musical "hiccup". The name comes from the French "hoquet": hipccup.

7. COMPREHENTION TEXT QUESTIONS

1. What did "Motetus" mean in the Middle Ages?
2. What voices were the tenor and the duplum " ?
3. What was the base of a motet?
4. Why are some motets called Latin and others, French?
5. How is the text of the upper voices of a conductus motet?
6. Why is a motet called politextual?
7. How many voices does a double motet have?
8. What is the most used form of motet from the second half of the 13th century?
9. What is an "ente" motet ?
10. What is a hoquetus-style motet?