

2008

Review of Peter Wright, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music, V: Settings of the Sanctus and Agnus dei*.

Peter M. Lefferts

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, plefferts1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub>



Part of the [Music Commons](#)

---

Lefferts, Peter M., "Review of Peter Wright, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music, V: Settings of the Sanctus and Agnus dei*." (2008).  
*Faculty Publications: School of Music*. 35.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/musicfacpub/35>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Music, School of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications: School of Music by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Peter Wright, ed., *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music, V: Settings of the Sanctus and Agnus dei*. Early English Church Music 47. London: Published for the British Academy by Stainer and Bell, 2006. xviii+167 pp. £55. ISBN 0 852 49884 5.

Peter Wright's edition of English settings of the Sanctus and Agnus from the second quarter of the fifteenth century is the latest addition to the Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music subseries of Early English Church Music, and the second to adopt a new format for notation and editorial apparatus. A review in this journal of the previous edition in the series describes the new format, so my comments here about it can be brief.<sup>1</sup> Each work is presented in score using a modern quasi-facsimile typeface (black void with full black coloration) to represent the original notation.<sup>2</sup> A generous critical apparatus for each work is clearly laid out, with highly valuable commentary in the General Remarks for many items. The editor's introduction discusses the policy of selection of repertory, the styles of the works edited, their age, sources, and composer attributions, the kinds of distortions in transmission that these English works undergo in continental manuscripts, some evidence for proportional planning in selected works, and the organisation of the volume, including the justification for assembling five proposed Sanctus–Agnus pairs. I do not feel the lack of anything in this introduction except for breathing space; it is very terse and condensed. As a counterbalance to its density, I would recommend having to hand the editor's own separate spin-off study of Sanctus–Agnus pairs, not only for its considerably more

<sup>1</sup> Peter M. Lefferts, review of *Fifteenth-Century Liturgical Music, IV: Early Masses and Mass Pairs*, EECM 42 (2001), ed. Gareth Curtis, in *Plainsong & Medieval Music* 12 (2003), 213–22. A valuable review-article on the Curtis volume by Alejandro Enrique Planchart, also discussing the format and including a reproduction of a page from the edition, is 'Early English Masses', *Early Music* 31 (2003), 266–72.

<sup>2</sup> Works surviving in black full notation with red coloration have been translated into black void with black coloration in the present edition; these include nos 11, 12, 13, 15 and 23.

extended examination of the issues surrounding pairing, but for its general insights into the stylistic idiom of this material.<sup>3</sup>

The most efficient way to describe Wright's choice of material to be edited is not the most helpful. Nonetheless, in brief, what we have here are most of the remaining Sanctus and Agnus settings from band I of the Curtis-Wathey list of liturgical repertory (hereafter C-W),<sup>4</sup> after excluding most of those already available in modern critical editions.<sup>5</sup> C-W band I is a chronological category from about 1400 to 1440, comprising works in a variety of styles from the era of Old Hall to the end of Dunstaple's compositional career.<sup>6</sup> By Wright's own admission, what he thus has to deal with is a miscellaneous collection offering only a partial view of the repertory (p. ix).

Although Wright's characterisation of the contents of EECM 47 is incontrovertible, it is most certainly overly negative (apologetic? self-deprecating?). To reverse field and put a positive spin on what he's done, indeed to make plain how important and useful a volume we have here, a more panoramic and dynamic – if more extended – description is in order. Setting our chronological boundaries at 1200 to 1440, it is possible to identify three successive dominating paradigms for English composition of polyphony for the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, each aligning roughly with a century.<sup>7</sup> The oldest paradigm, that of the thirteenth century, has composers setting Sanctus and Agnus tropes,<sup>8</sup> if this tradition continues beyond 1300, it is through the use of settings of double versicle texts and motets as Sanctus sequels or Sanctus substitutes. This oldest practice is succeeded by a primarily fourteenth-century paradigm of using

<sup>3</sup> Peter Wright, 'Early 15th-Century Pairings of the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, and the Case of the Composer "Bloyrn"', *Journal of Musicology* 22 (2005), 604–43.

<sup>4</sup> Gareth Curtis and Andrew Wathey, 'Fifteenth-Century English Liturgical Music: A List of the Surviving Repertory', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 27 (1994), 1–69. Wright offers important amendments to C-W. In respect of the Sanctus (S), Agnus Dei (A) and Sanctus–Agnus pairs (SA), he has observed that S 44=S 59 and A 37=A 40. He sets aside S 43, which does not appear to be a Sanctus, and A 10, which is not clearly an Agnus. S 51 and A 39 are set aside as not English. Further, Wright adds an overlooked Sanctus not in C-W that is edited by him as EECM 47, no. 12. Wright proposes rejection of SA 5 and SA 6 as pairs, proposing S 56+A 41, the Sanctus of SA 6+A 32, S 69+the Agnus of SA 6, S 70+A 42, and S 63+A 38.

<sup>5</sup> As Wright observes (p. ix), this primarily applies to the small number of comparable works in the Old Hall manuscript or by John Dunstaple; see Andrew Hughes and Margaret Bent, eds, *The Old Hall Manuscript*, 3 vols in 4, *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 46 ([Rome], 1969–73) and Manfred Bukofzer, ed., *John Dunstaple: Complete Works*, *Musica Britannica* 8 (London, 1953; rev. edn by Margaret Bent, Ian Bent and Brian Trowell, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> See Gareth Curtis, 'Stylistic Layers in the English Mass Repertory, c. 1400–1450', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 109 (1982–83), 23–28.

<sup>7</sup> The six Mass Ordinary texts most often set by English composers from 1200 to the 1440s (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei and Ite Missa Est) each have differently unfolding histories and stylistic paradigms. The Sanctus and Agnus Dei are relatively parallel in their development, and their careers have an affinity, but not full equivalence, to those of the Kyrie and Ite. The polyphonic Gloria and Credo develop at a slightly further remove. The careers and stylistic idioms of the different Mass Ordinary items are only fully linked when they are assembled into a cycle on an alien *cantus firmus*.

<sup>8</sup> The principal edition of the publishable English thirteenth-century settings is Max Lütolf, *Die mehrstimmigen Ordinarium Missae-Sätze vom ausgehenden 11. bis zur Wende des 13. zum 14. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols (Bern, 1970), but there is additional material in Luther Dittmer, ed., *The Worcester Fragments*, *Musicological Studies and Documents* 2 (Rome, 1957) and Ernest H. Sanders, ed., *English Music of the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, *Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century* 14 (Paris and Monaco, 1979).

untroped Sanctus and Agnus plainchants as monorhythmic *cantus firmi* for three-voice settings in score in English discant, a tradition whose very last traces are to be found amongst the ferial discant settings in score of the Old Hall manuscript,<sup>9</sup> and in some Sanctus and Agnus squares.

The strong new paradigm of the fifteenth century, as yet barely visible in Old Hall,<sup>10</sup> flourishes from the 1420s forward. Here the stereotypical Sanctus and Agnus Dei are freely composed (that is, without *cantus firmus*) in three voices disposed in 'chanson style' (a quicker top voice over two supporting parts a fifth lower), notated in parts using black void notation, and exhibiting sectional changes of mensuration and number of sounding voices (à 3 or à 2). The new paradigm Sanctus is in five sections (Sanctus, Pleni, Osanna I, Benedictus, Osanna II); amongst various patterns of mensuration and scoring, the most common are  $\circ \grave{\text{a}} 3 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 2 / \text{C} \grave{\text{a}} 3 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 2 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 3$  and  $\circ \grave{\text{a}} 3 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 2 / \text{C} \grave{\text{a}} 3 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 2 / \text{C} \grave{\text{a}} 3$ . The new paradigm Agnus Dei observes the customary three sections (Agnus I, Agnus II, Agnus III), with the most common pattern of mensuration and scoring being  $\circ \grave{\text{a}} 3 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 2 / \circ \grave{\text{a}} 3$ .

Having taken in this panoramic view, let us return to C-W band I. Roughly half of its Sanctus and Agnus Dei settings are composed following the older paradigm of English discant, and roughly half represent the new, successor paradigm.<sup>11</sup> The small remainder are works (exceptional or experimental or 'transitional', especially as found in Old Hall) whose styles did not give rise to a significant number of successors. (This remainder includes some free works à 3 in score, and some free or *cantus firmus* settings à 3 or à 4 in parts.) The signal importance of EECM 47, then, is that twenty-nine of the thirty-one individual works edited in EECM 47 are in the new paradigm, providing us with excellent and uniform modern editions of better than half of all the surviving new paradigm Sanctus and Agnus of C-W band I. Indeed, if we set aside the tenor masses on alien *cantus firmi* from the same era, then these numbers represent two-thirds of all the band I new paradigm Sanctus and Agnus settings that are not in such cycles. The edition reinforces the importance of the composer John Benet in the generation contemporary with Dunstaple and Power, and helps to introduce the lesser lights Blome/Bloym, Soursby and Neweland. At this level of descriptive generality, the sense of miscellany or partial view that remains is primarily in respect to the two works not yet accounted for, which are English discant settings in score (nos 11 and 12, both Sanctus). They really are the odd men out in this volume and would better have been placed in an appendix than in the main series of works.

<sup>9</sup> For most of the publishable repertory, see Frank Ll. Harrison, Ernest H. Sanders and Peter M. Lefferts, eds, *English Music for Mass and Offices (I)*, Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century 16 (Paris and Monaco, 1983) and Hughes and Bent, *The Old Hall Manuscript*.

<sup>10</sup> For examples of new paradigm Sanctus and Agnus Dei in Old Hall, see Sturgeon's Sanctus, OH no. 114, Leonel's Sanctus, OH no. 116, and an anonymous Agnus Dei, OH no. 140.

<sup>11</sup> These percentages do not provide the dynamic sense of paradigm shift that is actually embedded in them. While the Old Hall manuscript documents the cultivation of English discant into the 1410s, this one source tends to skew upward the number of English discant settings in C-W band I. Even so, of some fifty-five paradigmatic English discant Sanctus settings of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, only fifteen are unique to Old Hall and for the Agnus Dei, only thirteen of thirty-one are unique to Old Hall.

Taken together, the new paradigm Sanctus and Agnus Dei of EECM 47 amply confirm the centrality of the stereotypical features described above, but they also help to define the scope of potential diversity. There is some variation in mensural practice (i.e., which mensurations are used and how they are juxtaposed simultaneously and successively), in formal articulation (e.g., some Sanctus settings have a full stop before *Dominus deus sabaoth* and *in excelsis*), and in the assignment of voices to duets. Most works are independent, but a small minority may be argued with varying degrees of conviction to belong to a Sanctus–Agnus Dei pair or else belong to a cyclic mass. Most works are freely composed, but a small minority, probably amongst the oldest members of this emerging category, are chant settings of an appropriate Mass Ordinary plainsong (e.g., Sanctus nos 1, 3 and 4 in this edition, all from the Aosta Codex). Extremely rare are independent movements based on an alien *cantus firmus*. There are single examples among the C-W band I Sanctus (Benet's work on *Iacet granum*, no. 10 in this edition) and Agnus Dei (Driffelde's work on *Eruclavit cor*, edited in EECM 42, no. 8).<sup>12</sup> The category in which we find both musically linked settings and *cantus firmus* construction in the Sanctus and Agnus Dei is, of course, the mass cycles on an alien *cantus firmus*, of which there just eight identified in C-W band I. A shift of balance in the new fifteenth-century paradigm towards four-voice writing and a greater prevalence of cyclic tenor masses takes place in C-W band II, beyond the purview of Wright's edition.

It is a well-known feature of the survival of repertory in the fifteenth century that most of the new paradigm English Sanctus and Agnus Dei settings come down to us only in continental sources. This is reflected by Wright in the order of presentation of works in EECM 47. First come the Sanctus in the Aosta Codex, then those from the Trent Codices, then those from English manuscripts. The Agnus Dei follow on, and are disposed in the same source order.<sup>13</sup> The new paradigm works in EECM 47 that survive only in English sources (Wright edits three such Sanctus and one Agnus Dei) are of considerable interest. We find here not only choirbook layout but also score notation (for Sanctus no. 13) and an early partbook (for Agnus no. 23). The same two items use a kind of simplified notation, employing non-mensural plainsong symbols, that may well have been intended to make performance of these works possible for a chorus that was not proficient in reading mensural notation. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that they also share a correspondingly simple (or simplified) rhythmic language.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Driffelde's Sanctus on *Eruclavit cor* is contrafacted from the Agnus Dei; see Lefferts, review cited in note 1 above, pp. 218–19. The small number of independent Gloria and Credo settings on an alien *cantus firmus* in C-W band I includes mainly works built on the scheme of an isorhythmic motet ('old paradigm'); single examples that we might call 'new paradigm' are extremely small in number, just as in the case of the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. I am personally of the conviction that Benet's carefully crafted Sanctus on *Iacet granum* must come from an otherwise lost cycle.

<sup>13</sup> The only work edited in this volume that survives in both continental and insular sources is Benet's Sanctus *Iacet granum* (no. 10), and Wright is to be credited with recognising the English concordance, thereby reuniting C-W S 44 and S 59 (as observed in note 4 above).

<sup>14</sup> The duet sections of Sanctus no. 23 are in mensural notation and have more diverse rhythmic activity, suggesting that these may have been sung by soloists of greater training and experience than the choristers (see Wright's comments on pp. x, 69, 115).

Returning to Wright's observation that EECM 47 affords only a partial view of the repertory, we are now in a position to understand how this view is historically coherent and insightful. Making brief appearances are representatives of the older paradigm (English discant) and, from insular sources, new paradigm works whose notational and rhythmic language opens our eyes to the limited performance capacities of some of the choirs desiring to tackle the newest repertory. The central corpus of this edition affirms the strength of the consistency of the new paradigm, while offering up an instructive sense of where there was scope for play with its parameters. The EECM enterprise, and editor Peter Wright, are to be congratulated warmly on this latest volume of the series.

PETER M. LEFFERTS

doi:10.1017/S096113710800082X