Representative forms and genres of secular vocal music in the 16th century

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In Renaissance Poland there were professional groups performing "new" repertoire of recognised European composers, although, I believe, it was not as commonly available as today. Professional performers, who improved their vocal or instrumental skills throughout their lives, usually did not have equally extensive knowledge of the newest musical and performative trends or currents, not to mention the information about the historical evolution of music[1]. However, both the performers and creators of music in the Renaissance were familiar with the variety of musical forms and genres of that time. The performance techniques preserved the stylistic specificity of the repertoire. Despite certain differences between the culture of Italian and French societies, in the 14th century no distinct stylistic differences were observed regarding the discussed musical forms and genres. Composers and theoreticians shared their experiences and discoveries. The music "travelled" together with the performers across Europe. It reached also Poland and other countries in this part of the continent. There was a large group of so-called itinerant musicians (actors and jugglers). In the 15th and 16th centuries, professional musicians were gathering in guilds and fraternities for protection against abuse and persecution from church hierarchs and secular feudal lords. Hieronim Feicht, one of the most recognised Polish musicologists of the 20th century, observed that "if we, for instance, look at the secular polyphonic music (madrigal and song, French chanson, Italian

canzonetta or metric ode), the more than limited number of these works alone indicates that the centres where they were performed were few. Nearly all the polyphonic secular vocal music in the first half of the 16th century is centred around the royal court in Krakow, and partially in Vilnius (also on the courts of the court of the Radziwiłł family and in the place of residence of prince Sigismund, the future king Sigismund the First. Only since the second half of the 16th century we observe a higher number of musical groups sponsored by the magnates (…)".[2] France shared its masterful counterpoint, and Italy – the new forms of song. It was the song with instrumental accompaniment that became the most important form in the *Ars Nova* period. *Ballata*, *rondeau* or *virelai* were usually three-voice artistic songs for two voices and an instrument, or one voice and two instruments, where the instrument was always the lower voice. *Ballata* is a song which originated from a dance form, composed of contrasting parts, where the solo part was followed by a choir with a usually cheerful refrain. Francesco Landini (Landino) (ca. 1335–1397) was the master of two or three-voice Italian *ballata*. *Rondeau* is a song for two, three or four voices, with a fixed refrain composed of two short phrases on which the entire stanza is based. The name reflects the fact, that the phrases were repeated over and over. A typical form of Italian *Ars Nova* was *caccia.* However, the most important form of that period was *Italian madrigal*, deriving its name from *mand-*

riali (a historic song) or *matricale* (apeasant song in maternal language) or *madriale* (a hymn to the Virgin) Madrigal was the preferred song performed at courts, by two voices and accompanied by the third, instrumental one.

New social conditions in the early 16th century enabled an unprecedented development of secular music. The forms of secular music were not as limited as those of church music, but they were not as elaborate. Polyphony, dominating in the church music, was opposed by monody in the secular music. Its melodic origin can be traced back to 15th century *ballatas*, *rondeaux* and *virelais.* The monody of this period is only tentatively developed by the composer. It is merely the beginning of thinking in terms of harmony. Polyphony was still found in songs, especially in Germany, and in the French ones even the dance-like character of song did not limit the polyphonic trend in the music of that time. The French *chanson* was neither polyphonic, nor homophonic, but it fitted perfectly in between the two types of music. More homophonic character could be found in Italian secular musical forms, created modestly in contact with folklore, particularly the dance forms: *villota, canzonetta, balletto*, or the wonderful carnival songs (homophonic) developed at the Medici court in Florence. At that time, printed scores of polyphonic secular music appeared in France, England, Italy and Germany. The titles suggested that the human voice could be substituted by an instrument. The choice of performers was not predetermined, but depended on the possible casting of singers or instrumentalists. It was only in the late 16th century that collections of works with fragments for exclusively instrumental performance were issued.[3]

Renaissance brought the ideological breakthrough, which was visible most in the secular music, developing robustly in Italy ad France. This music was associated with the evolution of various song forms, primarily of erotic, frivolous, jocular or satirical subject. It comprised mainly vocal works, with instrumental accompaniment or *a cappella*. They included:

• **Frottola** – Italian sentimental or frivolous song, performed mostly in the 15th and early 16th century. It was composed for three or four voices, had a chordic texture with elements of folk music, with a stanza structure (6-8 verses per stanza) and a refrain. The harmony often includes full triads and cadences, presenting the evidence that *frottola* contributed to the reinforcement of the major-minor system. Frottola considerably influenced the development of early madrigal.[4]

• **Villanella –** in the 16th century was a type of Italian song characterised by a simple, chordic texture, especially popular in the mid-16th century. It presented stanza structure, and the subject matter is often carnival. Frequently *villanella* demosntrated relationships with the folklore music.[5]

• **Canzonetta** (*Italian*) – in the second half of the 16th century it was a short vocal piece, usually a dance song (*balletto*). It is characterised by a free structure, determined by the emotional aspect of the lyrics.[6]

• **Canti carnascialeschi** – carnival songs of a very simple stanza structure, of rustic origin and with a clearly homophonic texture based on three or four voices.[7]

• **Chanson** (*French*) – the term was used to describe various types of songs. *Chanson* was at its peak in the 16th century, when *polyphonic chanson*, based on the imitation technique, was developed. C. Jannequin created the programmatic type of chanson.[8]

• **Ballata** (*Italian*) – the equivalent of French *virelai*. A work associated with medieval French poetry and music, originating from the trouvere *rondeau* AB-BA, which appeared in the 15th century in *bergerettes, frottole* and *villancicos.*[9]

• **Villancico** (*Spanish*) – a poetry and song form the 15th and 16th century, comprising a few stanzas and a repeated refrain. The common type is *villancico* for three or four voices, with a simple *nota contra*

notam texture, and a song accompanied by a lute.[10]

- **Pastoral –** a piece with a pastoral, idyllic subject matter. *Frottole*, *madrigals* or *villanelle* often demonstrated a pastoral character. In England, the Elisabethan era madrigals were initially referred to as **pastorales**, due to the subject matter.[11] **Catch** – a social canon song and **glee** –a type of a solo *canzonetta* accompanied by a lute were popular in the 16th century England.[12]
- **Caccia –** is a vocal canon for two voices, with the addition of the third, instrumental voice. The name of the form is derived from the subject matter: the lyrics usually describe hunting ("caccia" means hunting), although they also present fishing or scenes in the street. Probably this name is related to the form of canon, in which the second voice repeats at a certain interval the same notes as the leading one. The second voice appears to be chasing the first one. The third voice was written in longer notes, and was usually independent of the canon. With time, when three-voice structure developed, the individual voices were named: tenor (the lowest one), countertenor and triplum. This form was the most popular secular musical form in Italy. Its English equivalents were **round** or **rondellus**, **chace** in France and **caca** in Spain. In Italy, *caccia* was created primarily by the masters from Florence, i.e. Ghirardeleus da Florentina, Giovanni da Cascia, or Petrus da Florentia[13]. Imitation – was an important element of the developing polyphony. It consisted in repetition of a musical motif by different voices. An exact imitation was called a canon. Both forms significantly influenced Italian, French, English and Irish music. Ireland in particular is proud of the fact that its art never described nature, but presented abstract ornamentalism. The best example of the English musical naturalism is the canon in honour of the summer *Summer is icumen in*, in which four

voices create a perpetual round, and the remaining two accompany them with the motif imitating a cuckoo bird at the words *sing cucu*. Imitation and canon provided a solid model for the developing larger polyphonic forms.[14]

Madrigal (*matrix* – heritage, *matricale* – native, *mandria* – herd) is the most important genre of secular vocal music in Renaissance. The term "madrigal" denotes shepherds' singing, or singing in one's maternal language, and it refers to poetic forms (the illustrative musical representation), and not to the musical structure. The medieval madrigal was usually still for two voices, with lyrics in both, or for three voices, with an instrumental accompaniment. It consisted of three three-verse stanzas, and a four--verse refrain. In the 15th century the form nearly disappeared, to return in a new form in Renaissance. Madrigal appeared approximately in 1530, and became very popular among Italian composers. The dominant subject matter is erotic and describes love torments, death wish, beauty of a woman, as well as presents happiness, anger, jealousy and revenge. Lyrics by the following authors gained popularity: Pietro Bembo, Bonifazio Dragonetto, Michelangelo Buonarotti, Jacopo Sannazaro, Alphonso d'Avalos, Girolamo Parabosco, Ghiraldi Cinzio, Antonio Molino, Giovanni della Casa, Bartholomeo Ferrino, Giovanni Battista Guarini, Luigi Tansillo, Lodovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, and Francesco Petrarka. Madrigal used techniques such as *ascensus*, *descensus* and *imitation*. Then, various contrasts were used, e.g. *mutatio per motus* denoted changes of the rhythmic movement.

Theoreticians divide the history of Renaissance madrigal into three phases: early madrigal (1530-1550) was influenced by frottola, which is visible in the stanza and refrain structure. It was usually written for four voices, the theme was sung by the highest voice, which enabled performance with an instrumental accompaniment. However, it was very rare, as *a cappella* vocal

performance was dominant at that time. Pieces in this style were written by Constanzo and Sebastiano Festa, Philippe Verdelot and Jacob Arcadelt. Classic madrigal (1550-1580) underwent basic transformations. Following motet, it starts to introduce polyphony, which results in a more varied texture. The number of voices increases to five, excellent chromatic scale is introduced, as well as illustrative and programmatic character (imitation of the sounds of nature). The leading representatives of this type of madrigal were Adrian Villaert, Cipriano de Rore, Andrea Gabrieli and Giovanni Palestrina. Late madrigal (1580–1620) encompasses the works of Luca Marenzio, Luzzasco Luzzaschi, Gesualdo da Venosa and Claudio Monteverdi. Polyphonic devices are used more extensively, their scope increases, and chromatic character is becoming more distinct.

However, in none of the phases of development did madrigal present a concrete form; rather, it demonstrated a high level of variety. Leading madrigalists often performed *song madrigals*, based on the ABA or ABA1 scheme, where the same melody, but different lyrics were sung at the end. Next, especially in the works of Cipriano de Rore, a *motet madrigal* appeared, in which polyphony and syntactic imitation played the main role. Some of these pieces had a clear two-part structure, with *pars prima* and *pars secunda* marked in the score. Luca Marenzio introduced *dialogue madrigal*, in which the two choirs technique and "echo" were used intermittantly, and *declamation madrigal*, where the focus was on the lyrics. Specific treatment of the lyrics resul-

ted in the evolution of *litany declamation,* following the chant tradition of text recitation, *lyrical, dramatic, narrative* and *onomatopoeic declamation,* based on the concept of *imitazione della natura*. Later, concerted madrigal develops (classified as a baroque form of music). It is found in the works of Monteverdi. It consists in a "rivalry" between the orchestra and the solo parts, duets, trios and instrumental parts, which resulted in the development of cantata. Orazio Vecchi and Adriano Banchieri introduced **dramatic madrigal**, containing the elements of drama, and auguring the evolution of the opera.[15]

Since the ancient times, the idea of beauty was cultivated in various areas of art. Music was associated with the image of beauty and harmony (of sound) "(…) and since the source of beauty was nature and the condition man found it in, art was defined as imitation of nature. Hence, art and beauty are secondary to nature, which – as promptly noted – was against the experience, which proved that art transgresses nature, that it creates an illusion of reality, that it gives rise to fictional worlds endowed with their own beauty."[16] In my opinion, these words can in a certain way explain the function of the Renaissance songs or madrigals. However, the philosophical definition of this problem presented by Władysław Tatarkiewicz seems to be equally apt: "(…) mimesis (imitation) presents that which can be seen, and fantasy that, which cannot."[17] This "imitation" may lead to the thesis that authors of the Renaissance music understood and promoted the perception of the unity of instrumental and vocal sound as the embodiment of nature.

Notes

1   Z. Chaniecki, *Organizacje zawodowe muzyków na ziemiach Polskich*, PWM, Kraków 1979

2   H. Feicht, *Studia nad muzyką polskiego renesansu i baroku*, PWM, Warszawa 1980, s. 88.

3   B. Schaeffer, *Dzieje muzyki…*, pp. 78 and 98.

4   J. W. Reiss, *Mała encyklopedia muzyki*…, p. 318.

5   Ibid., p. 1037.

6   Ibid., p. 150.

7   *Historia Muzyki Powszechnej. Do renesansu włącznie*, vol. I, (ed.) J. Chomiński, Z. Lissa. PWM, Kraków 1957, p. 282.