

Thesis of DLA Dissertation

László Sándor

Du Fay: Nuper rosarum flores.

Encounters of Spiritual Streams of Musical Aesthetic in the Late Middle Ages.

Supervisor: János Bali DLA Habil.

Liszt Academy of Music

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I. Antecedents of the Research

I first encountered with Du Fay's *Nuper rosarum flores* on a doctoral course held by Barnabás Dukay in 2006. Then, the motet was demonstrated as a sounding counterpart of *Santa Maria del Fiore*. Furthermore, besides listening to the music, we paid special attention to the memoir by Gianozzo Manetti. During the mentioned course, the parallel between the numerical features of the motet and the structural proportions of the dome was based upon the paper *Brunelleschi's Dome and Dufay's Motet* by Charles Warren (1973). In addition, the analysis of the spiritual contents of Manetti's writing was based upon the article by Rolf Dammann: *Die Florentiner Domweih-Motette Dufays (1436)*. Few years later, deeply absorbed in the further investigation of the issue apropos of a doctoral lecture, I faced with the fact that Warren's standpoint had been debated by the musicology. Nonetheless, the musical profession accepted the assumption of the 'decoding' numerical relationship of the motet and the dome as an evidence, since there were more than 15 years between Warren's article and the first archeological paper against it. Likewise, David Fallows in his Dufay-monography asserts the link of the temporal proportions of the motet and the scales of the dome as a fact. Fallows' book had been printed in 1982, after that Craig Wright's paper *Dufay's „Nuper rosarum flores”, King Solomon's Temple, and the Veneration of the Virgin* appeared in 1993 only, devastating Warren's assumptions. Yet, according to the title of the paper, Wright proposes a completely different level of viewpoint, based on the Old Testament tradition of Salomon's temple, and the symbolism of the Virgin Mary, against concealed 'codes', with which he is getting closer to the spiritual approach of Rolf Dammann. Anyway, spiritual approach seems convincing and likable to me. Marvin Trachtenberg, American architect-historian in his paper *Architecture and Music Reunited: A New Reading of Dufay's „Nuper Rosarum Flores” and the Cathedral of Florence* tries to reconcile Warrens' and Wright's conclusions, but, in the meantime, he moves away from Dammann's spirituality. At this point of research, an idea of a study took shape in my mind, which should not exclude the viewpoints neither of the musicologist, instead, gives a wide-range scope of spiritual and intellectual streams, which fruitfully encountered in the thinking of the late medieval composers. In other words, my dissertation shows those aspects and intellectual directions which have to be well known and accepted simultaneously in order to understand the 'arcanum' of *Nuper rosarum flores*.

II. Sources

During the research I've found that the accessible material of the issue is enormous; due to Warren's and Wright's argument *Nuper rosarum flores* has got in the center of musicological interest. On the other hand, one of the missions of my dissertation could be to demonstrate, summarize and integrate this huge amount of literary material. In reference to the issue surrounding Warren's hypothesis I have to mention the two German authors, Hans Ryschawy's and Rudolf W Stoll's paper *Die Bedeutung der Zahl in Dufays Kompositionsart: Nuper rosarum flores*, appeared in the 60th volume of *Music-Konzepte*. This article gives a detailed analysis based on the number-symbolism of the motet. In my paper I discuss in detail the authors' conclusions and, sometimes, exaggerations. Anyway, Allan W. Atlas, Newman W. Powell, Margaret Vardell Sandresky and Ruth Tatlow have also joined to the discussion upon the issue of number-symbolism in their articles. The debate upon 'Nuper-code' has not been finished even until now. In her paper (2019) Emily Zazulia tries to demolish all of the previous authors intellectual constructions with doubting the exactness of the 6:4:2:3 proportion-scale, which has been accepted as the Nuper's temporal structure until now. Evidently, I take Zazulia's assertions under critical consideration. Charles Turner in his paper *Proportion and Form in the Continental Isorhythmic Motet c. 1385-1450* gives a profound overview on the temporal structures of the 15th century isorhythmic and mensural motets. Turner's study proved very useful in deciding the above mentioned debate.

To my mind, the most distinguished scholar on the field of Du Fay-research is Alejandro Enrique Planchart, whose two-volume Du Fay-monography, numerous papers, and the first cycles of the new Du Fay *Opera Omnia* are all extremely valuable works. In addition, Planchart was a choir conductor, and performed a lot of Du Fay-composition with his own choir. Those compositions, which were all subject to investigation within his lifelong Du Fay-research. In this manner, he possessed considerable experience about the nature of Du Fay compositions, hence I regard his writings as my primary literary sources. It is similarly important to note that Planchart was a composer as well, which fact is probably another feature of his scientific point of view. I also have to mention Robert Nosow within the remarkable Du Fay-researchers. Along his excellent studies I built upon his book *Ritual Meanings in the Fifteenth-Century Motet* trustingly. Some of the papers by Barbara Hagg, Margaret Bent, Rob C. Wegman, Michael K. Phelps, and further Du Fay-essays by Craig Wright were also useful to me. Amongst the few works written in Hungarian I could exploit László Vikárius's study. His ascertainments about the nature of intertextuality has been built in my thesis.

Some monumental works are also parts of the literary sources of the topic. Nosow's book and the two monographs by Fallows and Planchart was mentioned above. Both Julie E. Cumming's

The Motet in the Age of Du Fay, and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's *Compositional Techniques in the Four-Part Isorhythmic Motets of Philippe de Vitry and His Contemporaries* are unavoidable works in studying the motet as a genre. The most important essay in the field of medieval number-symbolism is Vincent Foster Hopper's book *Medieval Number Symbolism*. The primary source about the building of *Santa Maria del Fiore* is Ross King's *Brunelleschi's Dome*, which can be read in Hungarian, as well. These literary sources were all substantial within my research. Furthermore, for expansion of my background knowledge about the topic, some book was useful as secondary sources: Le Goff *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, Kristeller *Intellectual Streams in the Renaissance*, Huizinga *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Burckhart *The Renaissance in Italy*, Page *Discarding Images. Reflections on Music and Culture in Medieval France*, Tacconi *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence. The Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore*, Wright *The Maze and the Warrior*.

The guideline among the directions of approach proposed in my dissertation is definitely the symbolism of Virgin Mary. When investigating the entanglements of medieval Mother-symbolism, Marian poetry and love-poetry, I primarily followed Rothenberg's grandiose work, *The Flower of Paradise. Marian Devotion and Secular Song in Medieval and Renaissance Music*. In discussing the topics of contemplation and christian mysticism I tried to draw on the original sources, the works by Suso, Tauler, Meister Eckhart, the authors of the Saint-Victore monastery, Thomas Kempis, Pseudo Dionysius Areopagites and Augustinus. Additionally, I paid special attention to the works by Nicolaus Cusanus. In the case of scholastic writings I frequently quote St. Thomas Aquinas from his original Latin works and from the Hungarian translation of *Summa Theologiae* by János Tudós-Takács. My primary sources of architect and history of art in general were essays by Panofsky and Wittkower and in Hungarian Gábor Hajnóczy. Among the ancient and medieval architectural treatises Vitruvius *Ten Books on Architecture* and Palladio *Four Books on Architecture* are accessible in Hungarian. I quote these treatises in some points. The investigations of Gianozzo Manetti's report (*Oratio de secularibus et pontificalibus pompis in consecratione basilicae Florentinae*) are based on the studies by Sabine Žak and Caroline van Eck.

The motet *Nuper rosarum flores* was treasured in two manuscript sources, in Modena B (α.X.1.11), and Trent 92 (I-TRbc MS 1379 [92]) codices. I regard Modena B as the primary source from the two, because it had been compiled earlier than Trent 92 and, according to the assumption of Phelps, Du Fay could have been one of its compilers or scribes. Another substantial manuscript source is the gradual MS Aedilium (Edili 151), now preserved in Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, which I was able to study personally and take some photos of the source, as well. The relevance on Edili 151, among others, is that it contains a sequence *Nuper almos rose flores*, the composer of which presumably Guillaume Du Fay.

III. Method

The structure of my dissertation is based upon the cultural aspects instead of the musical factors of the motet, furthermore, some elements of the motet should be investigated on several points of the paper. It affected the danger of disturbing inner repetitions. I didn't want to avoid this danger, because it perfectly demonstrated the nature of the topic. For example, the cantus firmus of *Nuper* should be discussed at the theme of consecration liturgy but in the architectural chapter, as well. Likewise, the motet's text should be discussed both at the theme of the dome's consecration and Marian symbolism, furthermore, in the chapter of festal symbolism, too. Nevertheless, faithfully to the disposition of the topic, I divided the dissertation to two main sections, they constitute the paper's two big blocks which divide to subsections. The two big sections are built upon the terms 'fest' and 'temple'. I haven't met such a method in case of other Du Fay-studies; anyway, my dissertation fills a gap within Du Fay-research just because of it. Wright's article, in some regards, follows a similar way than mine, but does not propose each of the possible aspects. I tried to extend the efficiency of my investigation with analyzing in detail other Du Fay compositions and, in some instances, other master's pieces. Such way, Du Fay's motets *Salve, flos Tuscae gentis* and *Vasilissa ergo gaude*, and anonymous composer's *Porta preminentie / Porta penitentie / Portas* motet have been thoroughly discussed, but, of course, not as detailed as *Nuper rosarum flores*.

IV. Results

Prior to the Du Fay-theme, I planned to write my dissertation on fractal-mathematics' musicological significance and compositional applicability. Surprisingly, despite the almost six century distance between the two topics, there is considerable kinship between the fractal mathematics and 15th century motet-composition. The proportional correspondence of the small element of a structure with the element on a higher level, and the proportional similarity of the middle-size element to the whole creation is the basic architectural constitution of the late Gothic. After Cage's termination I call this phenomena 'micro-macro structure', which, nonetheless, is demonstrable in *Nuper*, as well. The reason for that is the factual and spiritual proximity of musical consonance-theory and architectural proportion-system in medieval thinking. The discovery and detailed examination of that relationship is an important yield of my paper. The architectural proportion-system conveys world-view, such as the mensural notation, in addition, the completed edifice is 'imago mundi', such

as the completed motet. The web of symbols becomes complete with the implication of the human body, which again is 'imago mundi'. Such way, the edifice of a temple, but similarly a composition can be regarded as 'imago' of men. The above mentioned analogical thinking is specific for the late medieval artist, the understanding of which is an unavoidable step to the comprehension of any 15th century motet or mass-composition.

I tried to discover the nature of medieval creative thought, but, no doubt, the exact reconstruction of the thought of medieval intellectuals is impossible. However, results of my dissertation can be the start-point for those, who plan to deal with this topic in the future. Just because of it, I intended to compile the bibliography as exhaustive as I could. It gives a helpful list of sources for those who would like to start their research in this field. As I mentioned earlier, Du Fay literature in Hungarian is meager, my dissertation tries to make up this shortage. At the end of the paper I show a list of manuscript sources, with presenting their digital resources accessible on the internet.

I also give a list at the end of the bibliography of medieval musical treatises, philosophical and theological writings, liturgical handbooks, which I have mentioned in the essay, or some of my literal sources quoted them. Questing and studying these works give an extensive view of medieval thought and spirituality. My opinion is that the part of Hungarian musicology which specialized in Du Fay and the 15th century music needs a wide-angle and comprehensive study on the late medieval cultural history. I wanted to content this claim with my work.

Not surprisingly, the theme took substantial influence on my compositional work. At the beginning of the research in evident relation to the topic, I was deeply immersed in studying the Gregorian chant. Shortly, I started to use plainchant melodies in my compositions, as cantus firmi. The first fruit of this experience is my *Praeludium for Orchestra* (2016), which is based upon the procession-antiphon of Advent *Ecce carissimi*. I have also made experiments in writing isorhythmic motet with structural cantus firmus, of course, not to imitate the sonority of middle ages, just for trying the applicability of the method. There is an extraordinary excitement of such work of retaining my own sonority by using 500 years old methods. One of the results of this attempt is my *a capella* Agnus Dei-composition (2019).

V. Documentation of the Activities Relevant to the Topic of the Dissertation

Recently, I gave lectures in the library of Budapest Music Center on tight or loose relationship with my dissertation's topic. These lectures are accessible on the library's youtube-channel. In addition, I presented two Du Fay-articles in the *Parlando* magazine within the framework of ÚNKP-2019 scholarship. At the end of some of my courses I arranged contemporary concerts from the compositions of Máté Balogh, Péter Tornyai and mine. The chosen works, both old and new compositions, were connected to the themes of the lectures, hence, they perfectly demonstrated the influence of 15th century music on the works of contemporary composers'. In spring of 2017 I arranged a concert of my compositions with the title 'Cantus Borealis', in which I performed pieces that had been built on plainchant and other preexisting melodies as cantus firmi.

Lectures and Concerts:

2017. spring – "Secrets and Enigmas Around a Motet: *Dufay: Nuper rosarum flores*" – lecture-cycle – BMC library

part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cgflTeG1oc>

part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJJhm-EWvsM>

part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBIVhRWMgNo>

2017-03-19 "Cantus Borealis" – concert – Liszt Academy X. terem

Works performed: *Helioscopia – Conditio alme siderum, Mira Mater, Hodie nobis de caelo pax vera descendit, Psalm 118, Two Folksong Arrangements, Christus ist erstanden, Intra tua vulnera...*

2017. autumn – "The Resplendency, Fall and Rebirth of Cantus Firmus" – lecture-cycle – BMC library

part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tudGo9YRTRo&t=2s>

part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPqdEPBUGMU&t=6s>

part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqUhrW7gxQQ&t=2s>

final concert: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8AU9eCaRh8>

2018. autumn – "Parallel Lives: Du Fay and Bach" – lecture-cycle – BMC library

part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0nTIV6Ttyc>

part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbhrSJ2DDV4>

part 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF6qw3C4DQY>

final concert: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-Z_fPMU2r4

Essays:

László, Sándor: „To Say the Unsayable, or Politically Correctness in Du Fay's »Vasilissa ergo gaude« motet.” *Parlando* 61. (2019/6). <http://www.parlando.hu/2019/2019-6>

_____ : „Who Rests Absorbedly in the Subject of his Contemplation. The Hints of Personality in Du Fay's Ave Regina caelorum Compositions. I.” *Parlando* (2020/1.)

http://www.parlando.hu/2020/2020-1/Sandor_Laszlo.pdf

_____ : „Who Rests Absorbedly in the Subject of his Contemplation. The Hints of Personality in Du Fay's Ave Regina caelorum Compositions. II.” *Parlando* (2020/4.)

http://www.parlando.hu/2020/2020-4/Sandor_Laszlo.pdf