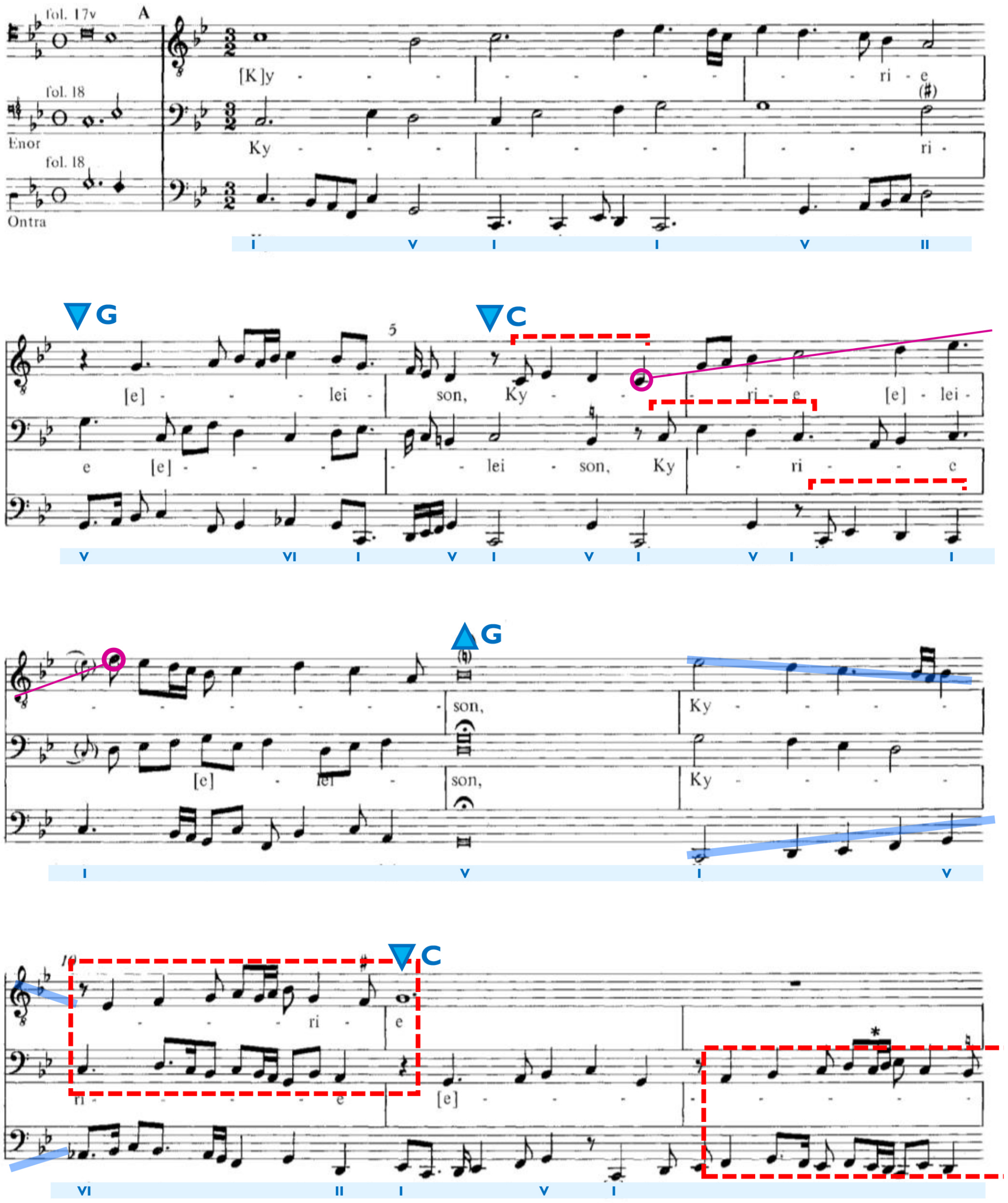
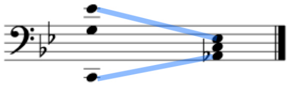
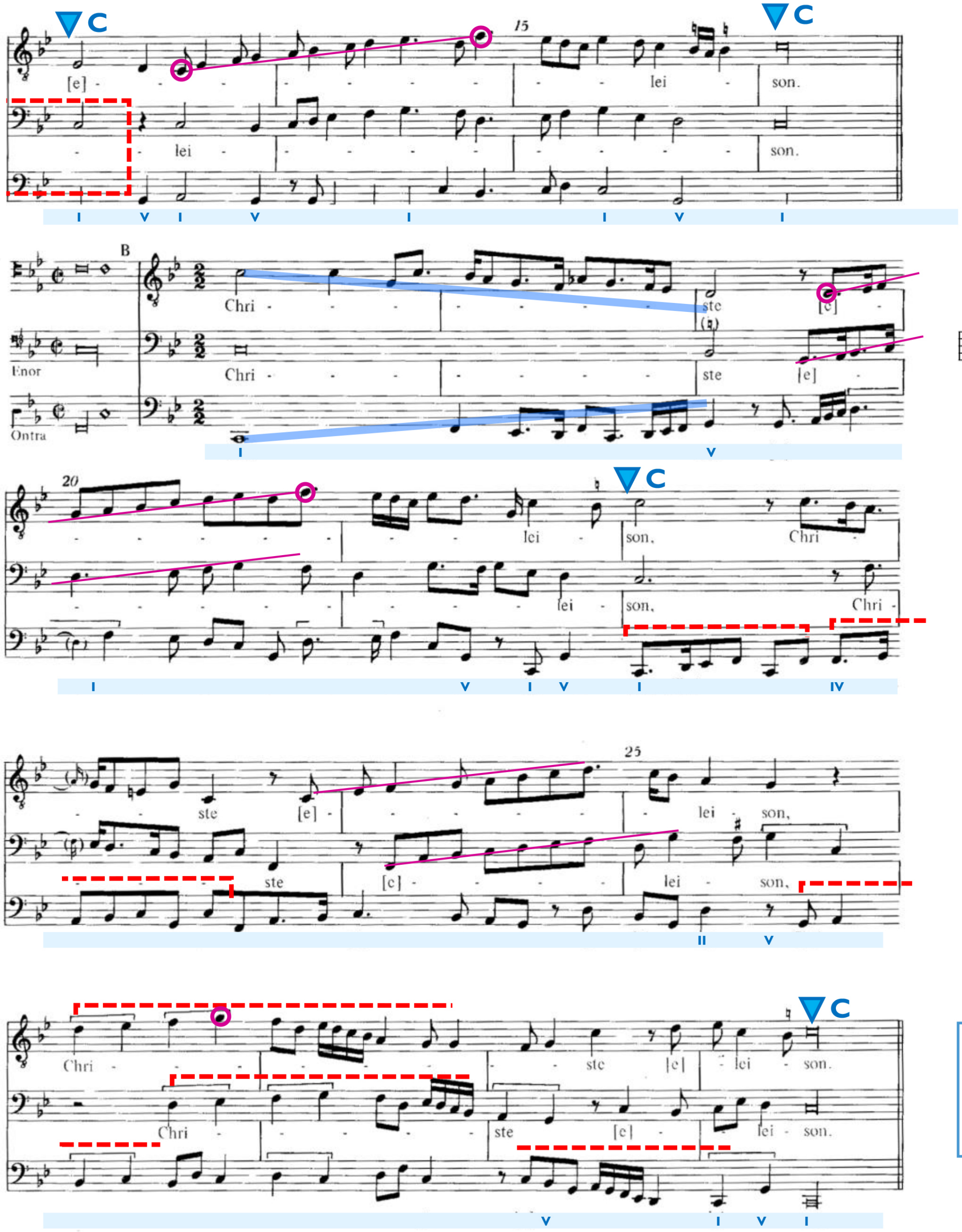
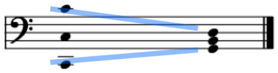
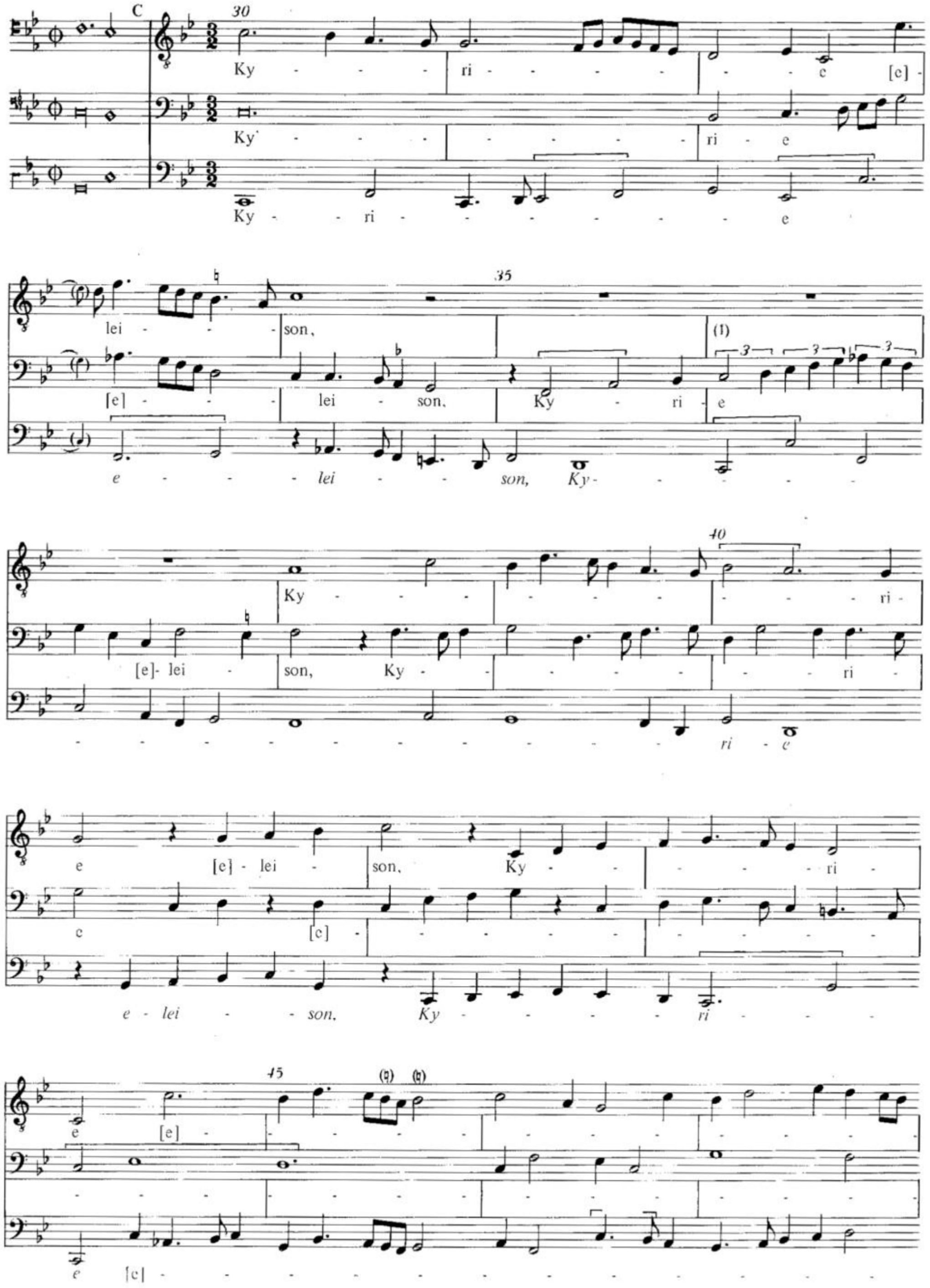
Another Look at the Kyrie by Johannes Tinctoris

Note the straightforward and direct harmonic language: a steady alternation between **V** *and* **I** *(essentially a cadence restated again and again). We have seen this in Obrecht's* Missa Fortuna desperata, *and it is a clear indication that we have come to the final decades of the fifteenth century.*

Measure 4 is an extended plateau on the dominant **V**. *It is part of a* **I-V-I** *formal shape on the larger canvas:*
I *in mm. 1-3 —* **V** *in m. 4 — and back to* **I** *in mm. 5-7.*

From m. 5 onward, the **I–V–I** *oscillation serves to maintain momentum without going anywhere. You can tell this, for example, from the imitation: the motives are not open-ended but closed. They are also non-overlapping, as if they are waiting their turn. Yet it is from this stationary passage that the top part launches its familiar ascent before the cadence.*


The contraction of range is extraordinary: from a compass of 17 notes to a mere 4. This, too, is typical of the very end of the fifteenth century, at least in Continental Europe. Dramatic gestures like these would have been unheard of in the music of Leonel Power or Guillaume Dufay. In the early fifteenth-century aesthetic, after all, such gestures would have drawn the listener's attention away from the consonant sweetness of the sonority.

A literal restatement of a two-part unit, but a fifth lower. Yet one scarcely notices it, perhaps because this is conventional writing, without anything distinctive or memorable.



Overlapping imitations at short time-intervals, with a simple but effective motive: an upward scale of a fourth. The very top note of the top part is reached in m. 26. Once again, it is typical of the decades around 1500 to reserve that note for a carefully planned moment.


C
30
Ky - - - ri - - - - - - e [e] -
Ky' - - - - - - - ri - e
Ky - - ri - - - - - - - - e
35
lei - - son,
(1)
[e] - - - lei - son, Ky - ri - e
e - - - - lei - - son, Ky- - - - -
40
Ky - - - - - - - - ri -
[e]- lei - son, Ky - - - - - - ri -
- - - - - - - - - - - - ri - e
e [e] - lei - son, Ky - - - - ri -
e [e] - - - - - - - - - - - -
e - lei - - son, Ky - - - - - ri - - - -
45
(♮) (♮)
e [e] - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
e [e] - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

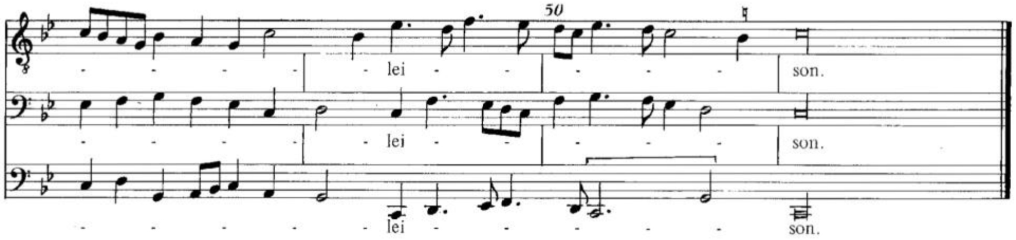



Image of Johannes Tinctoris
Valencia, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 835, fol. 2r.