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PUBLICATION BEFORE PRINTING: HOW DID FLEMISH POLYPHONY TRAVEL IN MANUSCRIPT CULTURE?*

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My aim in this contribution is to address the problem, if it is a problem, of the international transmission of composed music before the age of printing. Let me define the question more concretely. Commercial music printing (which took off comparatively late, not until 1501) is a venture that would have been unthinkable without a truly international market. No music printer was likely to recuperate his financial investment, let alone return a profit on it, unless he produced a print run of at least several hundred copies. Yet this involved him in a considerable risk. If he undertook to print, say, a volume of eight Masses, or twenty-four motets, chances are that he would quickly exceed the demand not only in his own city, but in neighboring regions as well. His principal buyers, after all, would have been religious institutions, and perhaps a few private individuals who could read mensural notation and who could afford to purchase music rather than copy it themselves. So most of the prints would have had to be shipped to places elsewhere, and, fortunately for the first music printers, there was a network of international book trade already in place. Music prints could be sent, along with Bibles, collections of sermons, the works of Aristotle, and much, much more, to markets all across Europe.

None of these commercial pressures could have played any part in the circulation of composed music before the advent of music printing. It is possible, even likely, that the workshop of Petrus Alamire in Mechelen produced choirbooks and chansonniers not only on demand, but made sure to have a collection of finished copies readily on hand.¹ Still, for each of those copies there could be only one buyer at most. If that buyer was an Italian merchant, say, who took one or two copies home with him after visiting the market in Antwerp, then yes, we can speak of international transmission. But even that is piecemeal transmission, by one or two copies at a time. It would have made little commercial sense for Alamire to have his team of scribes

* This chapter is based on a paper originally presented at the conference *Music Sources in Private and Civic Contexts* (ca. 1480-1550), organized by the Alamire Foundation at Bruges, 29-31 July 2008. In what follows, musical sources will be cited according to the sigla used in the *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music, 1400-1550* (Renaissance Manuscript Studies, 1), Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1979-1988. See Appendix I for a list of the full sigla to which these correspond.

1 For Petrus Alamire and his workshop, see H. KELLMAN (ed.), *The Treasury of Petrus Alamire: Music and Art in Flemish Court Manuscripts, 1500-1535*, Ghent, 1999; see also chapter VII (Z. SAUNDERS) in the present volume.

produce anything resembling a print run, that is, several dozen of identical manuscripts containing the same repertory. Besides, while Alamire's workshop is a unique and fascinating historical phenomenon, it could hardly be said to be representative of musical culture in the fifteenth century at large.

This brings me to the central question of the present chapter. During the fifteenth century, what could have been the incentive for musicians to send handwritten copies of music to other parts of Europe? Manually copying twelve Masses, twenty motets, or forty songs, for use by professional musicians, is not exactly like printing out a text file today. Unless it was done for payment, a copyist would have had to do it in his spare hours, which meant that it could take weeks to finish even one manuscript. And of course one would have had to purchase the materials and pay for the binding. What would have been a good enough reason to go to such trouble and expense for the benefit of strangers living hundreds of miles away? And what would have been a good enough motive to send the finished copy to another part of the world?

These are, of course, theoretical questions, in the sense that any answer we suggest is likely to represent a general model of music transmission. There has been no shortage of such models in the scholarly literature. One influential model, for example, has been that of the political alliance and the diplomatic encounter.² Although there is little evidence to confirm that music manuscripts typically changed hands on such occasions, this general model has been invoked to explain the survival of quite a number of manuscripts that turn up in places where we would not necessarily have expected them. The model does have its problems, however. Europe was teeming with traffic of all kinds: thousands of pilgrims made their way back and forth from pilgrimage sites each year, students flocked to universities, messengers scurried across the continent, and of course there was heavy international trade. Given the sheer intensity and volume of international traffic, it would surely be odd to insist that music, even courtly music, had to wait for the next political encounter before it could travel anywhere.

A second influential model has been that of the travelling musician, the singer who visits other parts of Europe and brings repertory with him on the journey. The problem with this model is that it is too general, that it is hard to envisage the scenario concretely. There were plenty of singers who undertook long journeys, of course – mostly, as far as we can tell, from the Low Countries and Northern France to Italy. Of the many examples that could be cited, here is one I recently came across, in the accounts of the Church of Our Lady at Courtrai in 1471:

*Et loto cum semi [?] cantoribus extraneis, discantantes in hac ecclesia, pergentes penes Regem Neopolitanum, ad ij lb. loto presentatis, valent xx lb. par.*³

2 See, for example, R. STROHM, *European Politics and the Distribution of Music in the Early Fifteenth Century*, in *Early Music History*, vol. 1, 1981, p. 305-323.

3 Courtrai, Rijksarchief, OLV Kapittel, Computus prebendarum, 1470-71, p. 12.

(And for a token and a half, for [a number of] outside singers who were discanting in this church and who were on their way to the King of Naples, at 2 pounds per token, amounting altogether to 20 pounds parisis.)

It is unlikely that these singers were members of the court chapel of King Ferdinand of Naples, for the document would certainly have specified this if that was the case. So we must assume that these were Flemish singers travelling, perhaps, in search of employment at the royal court of Naples. If this was indeed the purpose of their journey, then their biggest asset to bring to Naples would have been their musical skill and experience, and above all, their voice. It is hard to know what additional benefits they could expect from carrying musical repertory with them. The most likely reason, one assumes, would have been the novelty value of the repertory: it is easy to imagine that Flemish singers were more likely to gain access to the king if they could offer him the very latest in composition from, say, Bruges or Ghent. Yet novelty is a perishable commodity. What if it turned out that the music had already been known in Naples for months or even years? Setting aside the personal embarrassment the singers would suffer, their efforts would have come to nought. So it was risky at best to gamble on the novelty of the repertoire: unless someone had expressly asked the singers to bring along this or that piece, it was impossible for them to know in advance which settings would be received with gratitude, and which would merely be yesterday's news.

Even if a traveling singer knew for a fact that the work he brought with him was newly composed, what personal or professional advantage could he expect from becoming the instrument of its transmission? The more he allowed people in various cities to copy the piece, the less novelty value he could claim for it when he finally reached his destination. The paradox, indeed, is that if you travelled with new and unknown repertoire, and if you truly wanted it to be appreciated for its novelty in the right place, you were going to have to keep it secret and not share it with anybody – not until you had the opportunity to offer it to the person for whom it was intended. Yet there is no indication, not until the very last years of the fifteenth century, that anyone intentionally prevented the circulation of music in order to preserve its novelty value.⁴

Nevertheless, it is probably unfair to speak of these two explanations as general models, for they are seldom actually proposed in general terms. Usually the explanations are offered in response to *ad hoc* questions, for example, why this or that particular manuscript contains music that we know

4 For two late examples, see R.C. WEGMAN, *From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450-1500*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 49, 1996, p. 409-479, esp. 465 & n. 161. In fact, novelty *per se* probably had little to do with the reasons for music to travel. There are plenty of French or Flemish pieces that must have crossed the Alps again and again, even when they were quite old, because their known Italian sources transmit versions that can be shown, through filiation, to belong to several distinct branches of the textual tradition.

came from hundreds of miles away. This is the question with which fifteenth-century sources confront us more than once: how, in this one case, did the repertory get there? In considering a question like this it is only natural to look for documented examples of foreign musicians who had visited the region, or of major political encounters that had occurred shortly before the compilation of the manuscript. Yet even if one can propose a plausible scenario on the basis of such evidence, it does not follow that we can extrapolate general models that must apply to European musical culture at large.

The problem here lies less in the scenarios as such – which may be eminently plausible in many cases – than in the nature of the question they are designed to answer. While we certainly would like to know why certain pieces ended up in far-away places, the problem of international transmission is more than the sum-total of the questions raised by individual manuscripts. There is another side to the coin that is perhaps easy to overlook: a lot of repertory in the fifteenth century, quite possibly the large majority of it, did not travel at all. In fact the patterns of repertorial survival in this period are so wildly erratic, make so little apparent sense, that I am tempted to posit an alternative model as the point of departure for this chapter: in the fifteenth century, almost as a rule, music did *not* travel beyond the region where it was composed, and exceptions to this rule have to be identified as just that – exceptions. Apart from those exceptions, however numerous, there was no international network of transmission, nor even an international musical culture as we understand it. Each region was a center unto itself – not necessarily closed to outside influence, but not actively seeking it either.

To appreciate this point, it may be helpful to remember that the art of composition, in the late Middle Ages, was not as yet the specialized profession – the exclusive preserve of a few exceptionally gifted individuals – that it came to be regarded in the sixteenth century.⁵ As I have argued elsewhere, there were widely-available techniques in this period which made it comparatively straightforward, even for a musician of average competence, to put together quite sophisticated liturgical settings in a matter of days, if not hours.⁶ Any experienced choirmaster or tenorist would have been able to meet repertorial demands at short notice, and quite a few musicians must have done so regularly – even if their names are forgotten, and their music no longer survives. This underlines an important point: church musicians in Europe were not helplessly sitting around waiting for useful repertory to reach them from other parts of the continent. They could perfectly well supply the music they needed on an *ad hoc* basis, and supplement it with whatever else happened to come their way. Musicians were neither dependent on international transmission, nor necessarily aspiring to it when it came to their own settings, however good these might be. Once a choirmaster had supplied the music for the purposes of his local collegiate church or cathedral, there was no ready

5 For this historical development, see WEGMAN, *From Maker to Composer*.

6 R.C. WEGMAN, *Compositional Practice in the Fifteenth-Century Motet*, in T. SCHMIDT-BESTE (ed.), *On the Relationship of Imitation and Text Treatment? The Motet around 1500* (Epitome musical), Turnhout, in press.

way for him to “publish” it in the modern sense, nor, for that matter, any compelling reason why the rest of the world should take notice of his piece. For a choirmaster active, say, in Treviso, it would scarcely have been worth the trouble to despatch a new setting all the way to Rome, Paris, or Bruges, if musicians there could fashion their own works for a fraction of the trouble.

What I am suggesting, in other words, is that the rule was for music *not to travel* at all, that there was no need for it travel, and that we should not be surprised to find that most repertory actually never left a circumscribed geographical region. If that region has left us hardly any musical sources, or perhaps none at all – as is true, for example, of central France and England – chances are that most of the repertory will be lost forever, never having been transmitted to other regions in Europe (such as northern Italy) where the state of survival is a great deal better. This, for example, could explain the fact that when fragments of fifteenth-century Mass and motet sources do turn up in these regions, there are almost always a number of pieces that we did not know from any other source. Consider only the number of cyclic Masses from the fifteenth century whose existence we have come to know only in the last fifty years, thanks to the discovery of fragmentary sources (see Appendix II). Almost every fragment that comes to light – whether in England, the Low Countries, France, Germany, or even Italy – adds new works to the list. Nor is that perhaps surprising, for most of the known Masses from this period (certainly up to about the 1490s) tend to survive in one or two sources at most, suggesting that we are probably fortunate to possess even these. True, there are exceptions to this rule: settings like the anonymous English *Caput* Mass, Petrus de Domarto’s *Missa Spiritus almus*, or Busnoys’s *Missa L’homme armé* seem to have enjoyed wide international circulation, for they survive even today in an unusually large number of sources, in different corners of the Continent. Yet what makes these cases exceptional is the lack of a similar pattern of survival in the vast majority of cases.

Consider also the number of Mass cycles whose existence is known to us from archival documents or theoretical treatises, yet whose music has not come down to us. Theorists have affirmed the existence of at least four Masses by Johannes Ockeghem that now appear to be lost: *Missa La belle se siet*, *Missa Jocundare*, *Missa Domine non secundum peccata nostra*, and a *Missa De beata Virgine*.⁷ Similarly, according to a curious but credible notice in a nineteenth-century journal on Dutch literature, history, and culture, Robert van Maldeghem had discovered, in 1859, a source containing fourteen motets and six Masses by Antoine Busnoys – vastly more than we know of today.⁸ (One

7 Johannes OCKEGHEM, *Collected Works*, ed. D. PLAMENAC, 3 vols., Philadelphia, 1947-92, vol. 2, p. xli-xliii.

8 *Vaderlands museum voor Nederduitsche letterkunde, oudheid en geschiedenis*, 3, 1859-1860, p. 404 (my translation): “A question. Mr Robert van Maldeghem, one of our most distinguished scholars on music, has recently made a very important discovery, consisting in fourteen motets and six Masses of the famous composer Busnoys. It is known that he was attached as a singer at the court of Charles the Bold. But when this prince died, in the battle of Nancy on 5 January 1477, the court chapel was disbanded, and it seems that Busnoys was appointed dean of the church of Veurne as a reward for services rendered. Are there any

can only hope that this source has escaped destruction, and that it will one day turn up in private possession.) Copying payments in centers like Cambrai, Bruges, and others, occasionally refer to Masses by title and composer: this is how we know, for example, that the musician Rasse de Lavenne was active as a Mass composer in the early 1460s, and a man named Fremiet likewise in the early 1470s, and that Johannes Regis had written a *Missa Crucis* some time before 1464.⁹

Even today, archival research keeps turning up the names of otherwise unknown composers. In the archives of Rouen cathedral, for example, I recently came across the testament of a musician by the name of Jean de Saint Gille, dated 1500, which mentions in passing that he had composed a Requiem Mass in polyphony for his own commemoration.¹⁰ This work no longer survives – nor, for that matter, do the Requiem Masses by Guillaume Dufay, Bartolomeo Ramis, and Paulus de Roda, which are likewise mentioned in archival or other sources. Similarly, a recent visit to the archives of Le Mans Cathedral brought to light several documents about a musician named Guillaume Lonnet, who was active there as *magister psallete* in 1528, and who, according to the chapter acts, had composed a Mass for St Barbara in that same year. The music does not appear to have survived:

*Videant domini succentor et Jourdan officium cantus beate
Barbare per magistrum psallete presentis ecclesie compositum, et
refferant.*¹¹

(Let the lords succentor and Jourdan inspect the Mass for St Barbara in music which was composed by the magister psallete of the present church, and let them bring report.)

And yet, there is a paradox in all of this. Although the total number of Masses in existence, at any one time in the fifteenth century, must have been far greater than the number that now survives (by my count there are more

further particulars to be found about this man, or can anyone point to other works by him, of which very few are known thus far?").

- 9 For these three examples, see J. HOUDOY, *Histoire artistique de la cathédrale de Cambrai, ancienne église métropolitaine Notre-Dame*, Lille, 1880, p. 195 & 200.
- 10 See R.C. WEGMAN, *The Testament of Jehan de Saint-Gille*, in *Revue de musicologie*, forthcoming.
- 11 Le Mans, Archives départementales de la Sarthe, G 925, Chapitre cathédral du Mans, Conclusions capitulaires, 1528-31, fol. 2v (12 Oct. 1528). See also *ibid.*, fol. 8r: *Ad relacionem domini succentori qui asseruit visitass cantum officij beate Barbare cum collega suo in futurum in ecclesia nostra prout in eodice visitato continetur decantari ordinamus* (30 Oct. 1528). The *magister psallete* is identified as Guillaume Lonnet in an entry on fol. 44r of the same register. Lonnet is known to have served as a choirboy at the Sainte-Chapelle at Paris before Oct. 1510 (when records there mention him as *escollier estudiant au college de Navarre et nagueres enfant de cuer de l'église de ceans*), and was received there as *clerc* in Oct. 1511. See M. BRENET, *Les musiciens de la Sainte-Chapelle du Palais*, Paris, 1910, p. 57 & 59. Lonnet is not otherwise known as a composer; his Mass for St Barbara could well have been a parody Mass based on Jean Mouton's motet *Gaude Barbara*.

than 700 Mass cycles from the period 1440–1520 that survive wholly or in part, or whose existence is documented in contemporary texts),¹² it is likely that the average musician in this period knew far fewer settings than we do today – and this is due precisely to the contemporary limitations on international transmission. Consider how many gaps there must have been in the knowledge of any musician anywhere, especially one who did not travel far and wide. Judging from the principal Mass sources from the period 1450–80, for example, Ockeghem seems to have been little known as a Mass composer outside of France – less well known, certainly, than Caron or Faugues (see below). Most of what we know about Ockeghem as a Mass composer is based on VatC 234, an anthology of his Masses compiled by Petrus Alamire shortly after the composer’s death. How many musicians in fifteenth-century Europe would have known Ockeghem’s Mass oeuvre as well as we do? The same could be said about the Masses of Gaffurius, which do not appear to have travelled at all outside of Milan. Had it not been for the chance survival of his autograph manuscripts in the Duomo of Milan, MiD 1–4, we might never have suspected what a superlative composer he was – and many musicians in fifteenth-century Europe probably never did. This is true as well of Francisco de Peñalosa, whose splendid Mass settings do not survive anywhere outside of Spain, or, for that matter, outside of Tarazona (TarazC 2–3). English composers active after the 1460s made no mark whatsoever on the European mainland, and they, in turn, seem to have had no knowledge of or interest in the music of their French and Flemish colleagues. With one possible exception, no Mass composed in England between about 1465 and 1500 survives in more than a woefully fragmentary state.¹³

Statistics like these, which could easily be amplified, suggest that the idea of a truly international musical culture, with compositions travelling freely in all directions, is a myth. What was international in the fifteenth century was the stylistic idiom; the works themselves, by and large, tended to remain regional.

Yet if it was the exception rather than the rule for written repertory to travel, what sort of model can we propose for the exceptions? The answer, I suggest, lies in another model that I have outlined elsewhere: it is the gift exchange, the sharing and receiving of composed music as a gift.¹⁴ Here again, however, rather than speaking in general terms, it may be useful to consider a concrete example. The following case may initially look merely anecdotal, an isolated

12 See the masterlist of known polyphonic settings of the Mass Ordinary from the period 1440–1520, maintained on my website *Renaissance Masses, 1440-1520* (<http://www.princeton.edu/~rwegman/mass.htm>, active as of 10 October 2008).

13 The possible exception is the anonymous *Missa Sine nomine* in EdinNL 5.1.15, fols. 42v-51r.

14 See R.C. WEGMAN, *Musical Offerings in the Renaissance*, in *Early Music*, vol. 33, 2005, p. 425-438. For gift exchange and artistic patronage in general, see L. HYDE, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, New York, 1979; N.Z. DAVIS, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Madison (Wisc.), 2000; P.L. BOWDITCH, *Horace and the gift economy of patronage*, Berkeley, 2001.

example, yet we will soon discover that there are general rules that can be extrapolated from it, and that these tie in with much other evidence.

On 7 June 1484, the famous humanist Rudolph Agricola sent a letter from Heidelberg to his friend and pupil, the composer Jacobus Barbireau, then choirmaster at Antwerp. This was no ordinary letter, however: Agricola used the epistolary format to write a long scholarly disquisition on a topic dear to humanist hearts – how to pursue Latin studies. In fact the text would be copied and printed as a treatise in its own right throughout the sixteenth century.¹⁵ At the end of the letter, Agricola made a personal request to Barbireau. “Please,” he asked, “could you send me something of your own composition, something composed with care, that you would like to be performed to praise.” After the long letter he had just composed, that seemed like a small favor to ask in return, and we may take it that Barbireau hastened to send him some music by return mail – quite possibly a new setting composed specially for this purpose.

So we can view Agricola’s letter as one part of a little gift exchange: I spend several days writing up valuable advice on how to pursue your humanist studies, you send me some of your music. What we see as well is a clear incentive for Barbireau to send his works to Heidelberg, no matter how much time and money it would have involved: he has to make some gesture to thank his humanist friend for his trouble. But now mark how Agricola continues:

*Oro remitte ad me aliquid ex ijs quae ad canendum composuisti, sed quod accuratum sit, & cum laude ostendi velis: habemus & hic cantores, apud quos crebram mentionem tui facio, eorum magister IX & XII. etiam vocibus canendos modulos componit, sed nihil suorum audiui, quod tribus aut quatuor vocibus caneretur, quod magnopere placeret mihi. Nec ego tamen animum meum iudicij loco pono: potest enim fieri, vt meliora sint, quam ego possim intelligere.*¹⁶

(We have musicians here, too. Their master writes music for nine and twelve parts; but those of his compositions that were written for three or four parts I did not like too much, though it is possible that they are better than I can understand.)

What a strange comment, if you think about it. Agricola does not expect Barbireau to be the least bit interested in the name of this composer. Nor does it occur to him to send some of the music of this nameless figure, who turns out to be the composer Johann von Soest.¹⁷ Then again, perhaps it is not so strange. For Agricola, after all, there would have been no way of telling whether any of Soest’s music would be usable in Antwerp. Nor was it clear that Barbireau was in urgent need of new repertoire, let alone unable to supply

15 For this and what follows, see Rudolphus AGRICOLA, *De formandis stvdii epistola doctissima*, Paris (Robertus Stephani), 1527.

16 Rudolphus AGRICOLA, *De formandis stvdii epistola doctissima*, fol. 17v.

17 For Johann von Soest at Heidelberg, see S. ŽAK, *Die Gründung der Hofkapelle in Heidelberg*, in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 50, 1993, p. 145-63.

it himself. Undoubtedly the young composer would not mind giving the music a sing-through if it were right in front of him, and maybe he would even like some of it. But that was not a good enough reason for Agricola to get someone to copy it and then despatch a whole parcel of it all the way from Heidelberg to Antwerp. Besides, to judge from his elaborate and considered epistle, Agricola had done him enough of a favor for one day.

Yet if Agricola was not going to volunteer, what would it have taken for Soest's music to reach Barbireau in Antwerp? The answer to this question is suggested by a marvelous discovery recently made by Franz Krautwurst. In the city archive of Nuremberg, he has discovered copies of two letters dated 1484 and 1488, written on behalf of the Nuremberg city council, and addressed to *magister* Johannes von Soest at Heidelberg.¹⁸ What business did the city of Nuremberg have with a composer living more than 200 kilometers away? Both letters, it turns out, were written to express the council's warmest thanks to Soest for sending them a polyphonic setting of the Office of St Sebald, the patron saint of Nuremberg. It looks as if this had been an unsolicited gift on the part of Soest, but even so, the gesture was greatly appreciated. Let me present the relevant texts here in full, not only because they are of great music-historical interest, but also because they provide some truly valuable insights into the process of gift exchange. The first letter was written on 10 March 1484, only three months before Rudolphus Agricola's letter to Barbireau:

*Herrn Johanssen von Suzato, der ertznej vnd freyen kunst
Musice gelerten, vnserm guten freund vnd gönner.*

*Achtperer vnd wolgelerter lieber herre vnser lieber ratsfreund
Vlrich Gruntherr hat vns die künstlichen schrift einer erlernung
des Canons, neben vnserer stat wappen, von art der freyen kunst
Musice sagend, auch dabey ettlich gesang mit sambt lateinischen
worten darunter, von ere, lob vnd preise nit alleyn vnser heiligen
patrons vnd keniglichen himelfursten S. Sebalds, sunder auch
vnserer stat vnd pollicey verlautende, durch euch gemacht, gesatz
vnd im yetzo zugeschickt nicht verhalten,*

*vnd so wir aber auß dem allem ewr freuntliche naygung, gunst
vnd guten willen zu vns tragende vntzweifelig spüren, sagen wir
euch derselben ewer genaigten gutwillikeit hohen danck, mit
willen begernde, das wo es zu vergleichen langt vmb euch zu
verdienen.*

*Datum 4ta post Dom. Inuocavit 1484.*¹⁹

18 For this and what follows, see F. KRAUTWURST, *Zur Musikgeschichte Nürnbergs um 1500*, in *Neues musikwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, vol. 8, 1999, p. 93-106.

19 KRAUTWURST, *Zur Musikgeschichte Nürnbergs*, p. 93-106, my translation.

(To the lord Johannes von Soest, learned in medicine and in the liberal art of music, our good friend and well-wisher.

Esteemed and most learned dear lord, our dear fellow-councillor Ulrich Gruntherr has shared with us the artful document for the learning of a canon, [notated] beside the arms of our city, speaking of the liberal art of music, and along with this several songs together with their Latin words underneath, sounding forth the honour, worship and praise not only of our holy patron and royal prince of heaven Saint Sebaldus, but also of our city and government.

And since we discern without any doubt from all this the friendly inclination, favor, and good will that you bear toward us, we express to you our highest thanks for this same benevolent inclination of yours, desiring resolutely to earn [your favor] when the occasion calls for requital.

Given on the fourth day after Sunday *Invocavit* 1484.)

Note that this letter follows several conventions inherent in the gift exchange: first, there is the acknowledgement that the gift has been received in good order—the city council takes great care to describe the particular items in detail. Then there is the confirmation of their status as gifts, when the council adds: “we discern without any doubt from all this the friendly inclination, favor, and good will that you bear toward us.” Finally, there is the expression of thanks, and the wish to reciprocate the favor when there is an opportunity to do so: “we express to you our highest thanks for this same benevolent inclination of yours, desiring resolutely to earn [your favor] when the occasion calls for requital.” These were formal conventions of the fifteenth-century gift exchange, as we can tell by comparing this letter with the second one, which was written four years later, on 24 September 1488. Here is the full text in translation:

Dem wirdigen vnd hohgelerten Herrn Johannsen von Suzato doctor der Ertzenej.

Lieber Herr, die hystori von dem heiligen himelfürsten Sancto Sebald vnserm lieben patron, durch ewr wirdikeit von newem in noten componiert vnd vns zugesant, haben wir von euch zu sonderm danck empfangen, vnd darauß eur gunstige naygung vnd freuntlichen willen zu uns tragende wol gespürt.

Vnd nachdem die nach vnderrichtung der jhenen so sich der kunst versteen vast meysterlich vnd kunstenreichlich gemacht ist, haben wir darob ein gantzes wolgeuallen euch des fleissigen danck sagende, mit begirden das vmb ewr wirdikeit wo sich das heyschen mag mit gutem willen zu verdienen.

*Datum Quarta post Mauricii 1488.*²⁰

20 KRAUTWURST, *Zur Musikgeschichte Nürnbergs*, p. 93–106, my translation.

(To the worthy and most learned lord Johannes von Soest, Doctor of Medicine.

Dear lord, it is with particular gratitude that we received from you the Office of the holy prince of heaven Saint Sebaldus, our dear patron, newly composed in notes (*von newem in noten componiert*) and sent to us by your worthiness, and in this gesture we have duly perceived the favorable inclination and benevolence that you bear toward us.

And since it is made truly masterfully and rich in art (*vast meysterlich vnd kunstenreichlich gemacht*), as we have learned from those who are knowledgeable in the art, we are most content with it, expressing our eager thanks, with a desire to requite your worthiness in good will whenever this may be called for.

Given on the fourth day after St Maurice 1488.)

These are two priceless letters, all the more so because they allowed Franz Krautwurst to identify the actual music composed by Johann von Soest: his Office for St Sebald survives anonymously in the manuscript BerIS 40021, and thus we have a chance, at last, to appraise Johann von Soest as a composer, and perhaps to determine the reasons for Agricola's unfavorable judgement.²¹

Let us now return to the question we raised a moment ago: the humanist Rudolph Agricola wrote to Barbireau that there were singers in Heidelberg too, and that their master was in fact a composer. Yet it did not occur to him to send any of that master's music to Antwerp. What, then, would it have taken for Soest's music to reach Barbireau? By what channels of transmission might it have become available in Antwerp? What it would have taken, as we can tell from the Nuremberg letters, is this: the composer himself, Johann von Soest in person, would have had to send it to Barbireau with a cover letter paying his respects. All that is lacking in this scenario is a good incentive for him to do so – such as he evidently had in the case of Nuremberg. Yet when it comes to the question of incentive, why indeed would he have sent anything to Barbireau? Soest did not know the young composer, nor could he realistically anticipate ever to need a return favor from this man, who was about ten years his junior. Besides, Barbireau, unlike the Nuremberg city council, was able to compose his own music.

However that may be, the point is this: here we have two concrete examples of gift exchange involving musical repertoire: one solicited – when Agricola asks Barbireau to send him a song – and one unsolicited – when Soest sends a parcel of music specially composed for the city of Nuremberg. One of the exchanges is between people who already know each other, the other between strangers – though the point of the gift is precisely that they will no longer be strangers in future. Two lines of interregional transmission, one

21 BerIS 40021, fols. 246v–251r; edited in M. JUST (ed.), *Der Kodex Berlin 40021: Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin Mus. ms. 40021*, 3 vols., Kassel, 1991, vol. 3, p. 223–237.

from Antwerp to Heidelberg, one from Heidelberg to Nuremberg. The music travels along these lines, but not because it is music, or because it is somehow natural for it to travel, but because people happen to know each other personally, and do not mind doing each other the occasional favor. Extrapolating from these two examples, we could say that lines of musical transmission, both interregional and international, are made possible by networks of *personal* relationships (or at least the aspiration to build such relationships), from the lowliest of musicians to the most powerful of princes. Behind every piece that travels, there is a human element, an interpersonal story, a gesture of friendship, an invitation to reciprocate, and perhaps a response.

Of course there is no way of telling who is going to have a good personal relationship with whom, and as a consequence international transmission cannot have been any less unpredictable than human interaction per se. Could we have guessed that Soest wanted to win the favor of the city of Nuremberg? No: it is a beautiful discovery, and undoubtedly there were more exchanges of this kind taking place in the fifteenth century. Yet there is nothing that could have led us to suspect this particular connection. Both cases are really chance events, and they remain, at bottom, exceptions to the rule stated earlier – that composed music tended not to travel beyond the region where it originated. Few musicians maintained personal relationships with individuals living in a distant part of Europe, and few would have had good reason to send anything to someone they had never met. Only aristocratic patrons were likely to be the recipients of unsolicited gifts, which is one reason why international transmission may have been largely a matter happening between courts. But even here, the lines of international transmission must have been unpredictable, changing according to political ties and alliances, as well as shifting allegiances. And even between courts, I would argue, the rule was for music not to travel, unless there was a genuinely good reason or occasion.

However frequent musical gift exchanges may have been at any particular time, they do not add up to, or form the basis of, an international musical culture. Each identifiable region or country, even in France or the Low Countries, was a center unto itself, one whose importance to music history was not contingent upon how much or how little contact it had with the world abroad. Even the celebrated music theorist Johannes Tinctoris (c.1435–1511), who is probably our main source for the idea of an international musical culture, never presumed to be speaking for Europe as a whole, rather than the French in particular. Unless he had done a lot of traveling, it is doubtful that he had first-hand knowledge of musical life in England, Germany, Spain, Central Europe, or indeed large parts of Italy.

To give another example, the *contenance angloise* – the English-influenced style that is seen to have marked the beginning of a new musical epoch around 1430 –, for all its historic importance, could easily have resulted, ultimately, from a singular event. All the English polyphony copied in mainland Europe up to the mid-1440s could have been contained in one choirbook. It is easy to imagine such a choirbook being presented as a gift to the Court of Burgundy by the Duke of Bedford, say, and its repertoire being

distributed from there to the various ducal residences in the Burgundian Netherlands – from where, in turn, it could easily find its way to local choral foundations. Often, the most dramatic turning points in music history involve the most improbable chains of events. There is no reason why the *contenance angloise* should have been any more predictable or necessary a development than, say, a poor white truckdriver from Memphis becoming the mega-sensation Elvis in 1956.

This brings us to what is probably the chief problem about the idea of an international musical culture. It posits the existence of something as regular as a network of international transmission, some sort of permanent infrastructure, when in fact the vicissitudes of repertorial travel may have had more in common with the weather. If we subscribe to the idea of such a network, questions are bound to accumulate. To mention just one example, it would appear strangely odd that Ockeghem's *Missa L'homme armé* was copied in the Church of St Donatian at Bruges as late as 1467.²² This setting is commonly believed to date from the 1450s: are we to infer that no one in Bruges knew of the piece before it was copied that year – which, coincidentally (or perhaps not so coincidentally) is shortly after Ockeghem visited the Burgundian court and had been welcomed there by Busnoys?²³ The problem here, I think, lies in the unstated if attractive assumption that Ockeghem was an internationally renowned figure, whose Masses were bound to travel immediately anywhere. It is this assumption that makes the Bruges payment record look like an anomaly.

Yet how anomalous is it really? To return to a point made earlier in this chapter, Ockeghem is a virtual stranger in the Trent codices, TrentC 88–91 and TrentM 93. Of the more than eighty Masses or Mass pairs contained in these six manuscripts, only one, the *Missa Caput*, is known to be by him. Not a note of Ockeghem's Mass music is found in the major Mass sources from the third quarter of the fifteenth century – VatSP B80, PragP 47, HradKM 7, MunBS 3154, VerBC 755, ModE M.1.13, LucAS 238 – which contain between them more than a hundred cycles. Of the eleven Masses in BrusBR 5557, only one is by Ockeghem; the same is true of the more than thirty Masses transmitted in VatS 14 and 51. If we like to think of Ockeghem as a composer of international stature, perhaps we might explain away these apparent anomalies by suggesting that each of these manuscripts was somehow marginal. But why should we insist on that? What the evidence tells us, loud and clear, is that during the 1450s to 1470s, Ockeghem was a regional French figure at best, scarcely known to his contemporaries elsewhere. When all this is taken into account, why *should* his *L'Homme armé* Mass have reached Bruges before 1467? The truly remarkable thing here, perhaps, is that it reached Bruges at all.

Apparent anomalies like these suggest that international transmission, when it occurs, has little to do with intrinsic musical quality: in most cases it

22 R. STROHM, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, Oxford, 1985, p. 30.

23 See P. HIGGINS, *In hydraulis Revisited: New Light on the Career of Antoine Busnois*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 36, 1986, p. 36–86.

seems to be a matter rather of sheer happenstance. Outside of Milan, as I remarked before, no-one seems to have taken much notice of the music of Gaffurius, and this makes it only the more fortunate that we still possess his autograph manuscripts. Yet does the lack of international circulation mean that his music is of inferior quality, or that Milan was not well-connected as a musical center? Far from it: the Masses of Gaffurius are richly imaginative and breathtakingly original, masterfully composed, and there is no reason why they should not have circulated widely – if only they had made it to the right place at the right time. But they never did, and indeed why should they have? There was plenty of good Mass music to go round everywhere. The criterion of international transmission and success is one that we impose, not one that necessarily reflects the everyday conditions of fifteenth-century musical culture.

To return to another example I mentioned earlier, I cannot think of a single good reason why Peñalosa was completely unknown outside of Spain. His Masses are first-rate, rivalling those of the best composers of his time, and they should have won him international recognition, if only it had occurred to someone to send a copy across the Pyrenees – preferably to the editor of Ottaviano Petrucci, who would no doubt have recommended these settings for immediate publication. Similarly, as I mentioned a moment ago, Ockeghem seems to have been an obscurely regional, central-French figure, despite his association with the French royal court. For a long time his Masses are not nearly as widely transmitted in Italy as those of Caron or even Faugues. Yet the chance survival of the Chigi Codex, VatC 234, has made it appear as if he was the most prolific Mass composer of his generation, and this, together with Tinctoris's praise, has made him the leading composer *tout court*.

The marvelous thing about gift exchanges is that they are always inherently personal gestures, that those involved in the exchange know each other, or at least will henceforth be on friendly terms because of the exchange. It means that such international transmission as we can identify in the fifteenth century is not an anonymous process, not a matter simply of shipping music in bulk from one part of the continent to the other, but that there is always a human story behind each and every piece that travels. When printed partbooks start to be produced en masse, are shipped to foreign markets and sold there for profit, international musical culture in the proper sense has truly arrived, and then we will be required to ask very different questions indeed.

Appendix I:**List of manuscripts as cited in this chapter with corresponding full sigla.**

ArunC 534	Arundel, The Castle, Archives of the Duchy of Norfolk, ms 534
BerlS 40021	Berlin, SBPK, Mus. 40021 (<i>olim</i> Z 21)
BolSP s.s.	Bologna, Basilica di San Petronio, ms without signature
BrusBR 5557	Brussels, KBR, ms 5557
CovC A.3	Coventry, City Record Office, Library of the Coventry Corporation, ms A 3
HradKM 7	Hradec Králové, Krajske Muzeum, ms II A 7 (Speciálník)
LonBL 54324	London, BL, Add. ms 54324
LucAS 238	Lucca, Archivio di Stato, MS 238
LyonBM 6632	Lyon, BM, ms 6632
MilD 1–4	Milan, Archivio della Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo, Sezione Musicale, Libroni 1–4 (<i>olim</i> 2266–2269)
ModE M.1.13	Modena, Bibl. Estense, ms α.M.1.13 (<i>olim</i> lat. 456)
MunBS 3154	Munich, BSB, Mus. 3154
PragP 47	Prague, Památník Národního Pisemnictví, Strahovská Knihovna, MS D.G.IV.47
SaxB s.s.	Saxilby-with-Ingleby, Parish of St Botolph, MS without signature
TarazC 2–3	Tarazona, Cathedral, MSS 2–3
TrentC 88–91	Trent, Museo Provinciale d'Arte, Castello del Buon Consiglio, mss 88–91
TrentM 93	Trent, Museo Diocesano, ms BL
TauntS 29	Taunton, Somerset Record Office, ms DD/L P29/29 (binding materials)
VatSP B80	Vatican City, BAV, San Pietro B80
VatS 14 & 51	Vatican City, BAV, mss 14 and 51
VatC 234	Vatican City, BAV, Chigi C VIII 234 ('Chigi Codex')
VerBC 755	Verona, Bibl. Capitolare, ms DCCLX

Appendix II:**Masses transmitted in fragmentary sources discovered since the 1950s and unknown from any other source**

source	Mass cycles preserved uniquely in source	number of Masses known from other sources
ArunC 534	anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i>	1
BolSP s.s.	anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> I anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> II	1
CovC A.3	anonymous, <i>Missa Tu es Petrus</i>	1
LonBL 54324	anonymous, <i>Missa Alma redemptoris mater</i> John Plummer, <i>Missa Nesciens mater</i>	1
LucAS 238	anonymous, <i>Missa Alma redemptoris mater</i> anonymous, <i>Missa Hec dies</i> anonymous, <i>Missa Nos amis</i> anonymous, <i>Missa Sancta Maria virgo</i> anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> anonymous, <i>Missa Te gloriosus</i> Walter Frye, <i>Missa So ys emprentid</i>	12
LyonBM 6632	anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> I anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> II	1
SaxB s.s.	anonymous, "Saxilby" Mass	—
TauntS 29	anonymous, <i>Missa Sine nomine</i> Dunster [?], <i>Missa Sine nomine</i>	1

ArunC 534: R. BOWERS & A. WATHEY (comp.), *New Sources of English Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Polyphony*, in *Early Music History*, vol. 4, 1984, p. 297-346, asp. p. 304-13; **BolSP s.s.:** C. HAMM, *Musiche del Quattrocento in S. Petronio*, in *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, vol. 3, 1968, p. 215-32; **CovC A.3:** M. BUKOFZER, *Caput redivivum: A New Source for Dufay's Missa Caput*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 4, 1951, p. 97-110; **LonBL 54324:** M. & I. BENT, *Dufay, Dunstable, Plummer – A New Source*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 22, 1969, p. 394-424; **LucAS 238:** R. STROHM, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, Oxford, 1985; **LyonBM 6632:** P.W. CHRISTOFFERSEN, *French music in the Early Sixteenth Century: Studies in the Music Collection of a Copyist of Lyons: The Manuscript Ny kgl. samling 1848 2 in the Royal Library, Copenhagen* (3 vols.), Copenhagen, 1999; **SaxB s.s.:** M. BENT & R. BOWERS, *The Saxilby Fragment*, in *Early Music History*, vol. 1, 1981, p. 1-27; **TauntS 29:** R. BOWERS & A. WATHEY (comp.), *New Sources of English Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Polyphony*, in *Early Music History*, vol. 3, 1983, p. 123-73, esp. 156-73.