

Laurence Wuidar. *Canons énigmes et hiéroglyphes musicaux dans l'Italie du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

Études de Musicologie 1. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008. 265 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$38.95. ISBN: 978-90-5201-457-9.

The Renaissance's fascination for the Egyptian hieroglyph resulted not only in the development of the emblematic genre, but also in the production of "enigmatic canons." An enigmatic canon is a polyphonic musical genre in which only one melodic line is provided by the composer. The other voices of the polyphony should be found by the reader, resolving the enigma presented by the canon, recreating the polyphonic score from the single melodic line. The composer's instructions to resolve the enigma are given by the way of a nonmusical, allegorical, and enigmatic device: a pious or mysterious image, and/or a few lines of text.

Laurence Wuidar's *Canons énigmes et hiéroglyphes musicaux dans l'Italie du 17<sup>e</sup> siècle* (based on his PhD dissertation, *Musique et hermétisme après le Concile de Trente: Astrologie et canons énigmes* [2007]) seeks to establish the importance of the seventeenth-century Italian enigmatic canons, arguing that they were much larger in number and much more influential than previously assumed. The importance of these canons lies, according to Wuidar, in their unique position in the musical culture of Italy. In a time when religious music very often had a dogmatic and liturgical aim, the enigmatic canons added a speculative and esoteric dimension, providing the audience with a hermetic and obscure form of musical expression based on the ancient tradition of the hieroglyphs. In these canons, the hieroglyph is

not utilized to show the superiority of the Catholic ideology. The composers of these enigmatic canons were also alchemists, astrologers, or magicians, who used musical and visual means to teach the (sometimes secret and esoteric) rules of astrology and alchemy to a small group of readers.

Wuidar's book offers an extensive and splendid introduction to the work of the most renowned Italian composers of enigmatic canons (Lodovico Zacconi, Pier Francesco Valentini, and Romano Micheli) and to the theoretical approach of these composers, as for instance described in an almost-forgotten manuscript left by Zacconi (*Canoni Musicali* [Pesaro, Biblioteca Oliveriana, MS 559]). It also includes numerous illustrations — unfortunately often rather poor reproductions of primary sources, which do not allow the reader to study the images, texts, and music in much detail — as well as informative and erudite references and a lengthy bibliography. Without any doubt, Wuidar succeeds in opening up an interesting and neglected area of Renaissance culture. In its clarity and attractiveness, his introduction will be helpful for various purposes, presenting a level of analysis accessible for scholars in various disciplines, of interest above all to historians, musicologists, theologians, and emblematisers.

Throughout the book, Wuidar emphasizes the similarities between the enigmatic canon and the emblematic genre or the emblematic mode of thought in the early modern era. Clearly, the literary and musical genre both generated from the combination of the visual and the textual. Together, the emblem's textual and visual parts should create an effect more powerful than that of either single component, according to most contemporary emblem theory, and the same principle seems to apply to the enigmatic canon. It is regrettable that Wuidar is rather vague in his description of the exact nature of the connection between the genres — a connection that in itself is interesting because it would reveal the tension between Italy's cultural orthodoxy and heterodoxy and the intertwining of two different kinds of cultural artifacts: the openly published emblems and the secretly created and consumed canons. Wuidar notes that the two genres share a visual dimension (67), mentions the fact that the Italian composers were aware of the emblematic tradition, and repeatedly claims the enigmatic canons to be emblematic of nature (33). But he fails to take into account a specific description of the emblematic genre and its representatives in making these statements. Loosely characterizing the emblem as a soul (=motto) and body (=image), at one point referring to a short list of (rather outdated) emblematic studies on the subject (26), Wuidar only begins to make a case for the embedding of the enigmatic canons within the emblematic genre.

In its current state, Wuidar's work offers a wealth of useful and insightful analyses of material that played an important role in defining early modern Italy. Wuidar's careful groundwork in the gathering and analyzing of all this material just makes you want to read more on the subject matter.

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