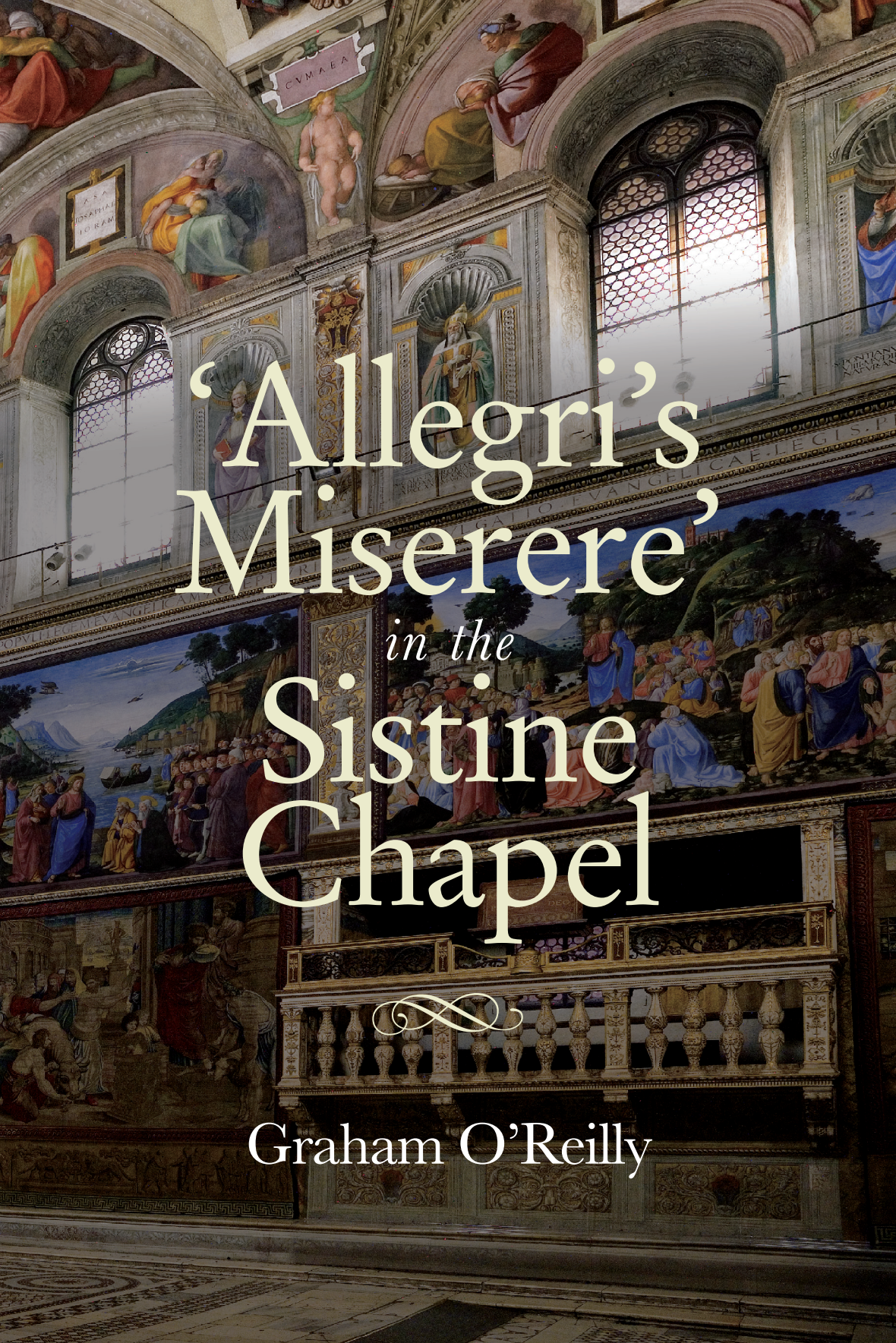

‘Allegri’s Miserere’ *in the* Sistine Chapel

Graham O’Reilly

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THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Front cover image: The Cantoria in the Sistine Chapel, showing the lattice-work above the balustrade which, together with red satin fabrics behind it, hid the choir from view. The picture also shows in situ the Raphael tapestries commissioned by Pope Leo X in 1515, the year after the frst Miserere was sung there. © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

Back cover image: What the singers saw – the Cantoria of the Sistine Chapel from the inside, showing the swivelling double-sided music stand on the left, the square back window on the right, the wall of autographs straight ahead, the sculptured ceiling that the singers felt made the acoustic diffcult, and the 'fnestrino' in an open position, through which can be seen the tall candles on the altar. © Author

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Note on the text

In musical citations, **pitch** is given using Helmholtz notation (octaves reading upwards from eight-foot pitch (changing on c) are C, c, c′ (middle c), c″, c‴).

Note values (in italics): *b* = breve, *s* = semibreve (whole note), *m* = minim (half-note), *c* = crotchet (quarter-note), *q* = quaver (eighth-note), *sq* = semiquaver (sixteenth-note), *d* = demisemiquaver (thirty-second-note). A dot is given as . (e.g. *q.sq* = dotted quaver-semiquaver).

The performing editions in Appendix 13 are reproduced by permission of Shorter House (www.shorterhouse.com), from whom they are available individually or in performance packs.

Translations from Latin and Italian are by Peter Hicks, from German by Paul Willenbrock and Karin Teepe. The author is responsible for all translations from French.

Introduction: myth and reality

FEW musical works have as interesting a history, and are nowadays so little understood, as the famous *Miserere* associated with the name of Gregorio Allegri. It is largely known today from performances in English chapels and cathedrals by choirs of men and, mostly, boys, and in concerts by professional choirs including women. But in its heyday, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, visitors came from throughout the world to hear it sung by the College of Papal Singers in the Sistine Chapel. There the higher parts were always performed by *castrati*, whose presence in the choir is documented from 1562. Their particular vocal skills were important for many aspects of the choir's unique performing style, and it was their contribution more than anything else that made the *Miserere* famous. Its popularity meant that a small part of the music of the Roman polyphonic school remained always in the public eye before the rediscovery of Palestrina in the nineteenth century.

After hearing the *Miserere* in 1770, Leopold Mozart wrote that 'the manner of performance contributes more to its effect than the composition itself.'[1] Later the same year, Charles Burney echoed the same thought almost word for word, albeit by hearsay, writing that 'its beauty and effect … owes more to the manner in which it is performed, than to the composition'.[2] Even this may be understating the case. The history of the *Miserere* shows it to have been one of those rare works which only really existed within a performance context. The notes of what we suppose to be Allegri's original composition can of course be transcribed from Vatican sources (see Appendix 1) but reveal little or nothing of what made it renowned throughout Europe. Within fifty years it was said to have become unrecognisable because of the ornamentations added by the singers, and within a hundred the five-part verses (1, 5, 9, 13, 17 and the first part of 20) had been recomposed; the first published edition – Burney's, in 1771

[1] Letter dated 14 April 1770, in *The Letters of Mozart & his Family*, trans. and ed. Emily Anderson (London, 1938), vol 1, 187. For the context, see Chapter 5.

[2] *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, 1st edn (London, 1771), 275.

– gives a version of those verses which has been modified out of all recognition from Allegri's original.[3]

The work commonly sung nowadays, referred to hereinafter as the 'English Miserere', combines that source (different in many details to Vatican manuscripts) with a fanciful reconstruction of the four-part ones (verses 3, 7, 11, 15 and 19) dating from late nineteenth century, which contains the famous 'high Cs'. It is wholly misleading insofar as it pretends to represent the work as performed in the Sistine Chapel by the Papal Choir: not only are most of the notes wrong, but it sheds almost no useful light on interpretative matters such as dynamics and tempo. On questions such as the pitch of performance, the number and placement of the singers, the prosody of the recited sections and even the method of performing the *cantus planus* (even-numbered) verses, it is almost entirely erroneous. Very few members of the numerous public that flocked to the Sistine Chapel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to hear it sung by its original interpreters in their own performance space could have recognised it.[4]

The very particular performing style in which 'Allegri's Miserere' was sung was its most distinctive feature. Listeners convinced that they had heard it could not know that most of the notes were the work of other composers – in some cases entirely so. In 1711 a new *Miserere* by Tommaso Bai was performed for the first time. Its harmonies were conceived to allow the incorporation of ornamentations particularly identified with Allegri's work. That indeed was its *raison d'être*; and as the works performed in the Chapel were never announced, the public had no way of knowing that it was not Allegri's. Henceforward it was given every year, sometimes complete, but more often in combination with the Allegri, in ways which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 10. For the public, however, there was only one *Miserere*, and Allegri was its composer. In the words of the nineteenth-century writer Ludovic Celler:

> Today it was his, but when it is not his, it is the same, we heard it. Ask three people who were in the Sistine on three different days, they will all say they heard the one and only, the unique, the amazing *Miserere*.[5]

[3] Verse numbers here follow the Latin version of Psalm 50, which contains twenty verses. *The Book of Common Prayer (BCP)* has only nineteen, as the first two are combined into one. It should be noted also that in *BCP* the *Miserere* is Psalm 51 (because Psalm 9 is divided into two).

[4] Still sung and recorded with enthusiasm by the best choirs in the land, the 'English Miserere' has taken on a life of its own, like 'Albinoni's Adagio' and 'Caccini's Ave Maria'. Recent editions of it, while acknowledging some of the problems, have done little to correct them.

[5] 'Aujourd'hui c'était lui, mais lorsque ce n'est pas lui, c'est la même chose, on l'a toujours entendu. Demandez à trois personnes qui ont été à la Sixtine trois jours différents, toutes les trois ont toujours entendu le seul, l'unique, le

This study starts from the premise that the only useful editions of 'Allegri's Miserere' are those which show the particularities of the Papal Choir's performing style and thus give some idea of what that enthusiastic public heard. The earliest source which sheds any light dates from the second half of the eighteenth century. Much of the discussion of performance practice is thus necessarily restricted to the period between the middle of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the choir was disbanded. To what extent we can extrapolate backwards into the seventeenth is one of the questions which will be considered.

Two such editions, both intended for performance, are proposed with this book. The first is a transcription of a manuscript dating from 1892 discussed in Chapter 12, written by Domenico Mustafà, star *castrato*, composer and finally, from 1878 until 1898, *direttore in perpetuo* of the choir. It gives a version based almost entirely on Bai's *Miserere*, which seems for Mustafà to have been the ideal 'Allegri Miserere'. It must be very close to that which was performed by Alessandro Moreschi, the 'Angelo di Roma', possessor of the only castrato voice preserved on record.[6] Mustafà aimed to show future singers and directors everything they needed to know for its re-creation, and this edition conforms to that wish. If any score of the *Miserere* can be said to be Urtext it is this one.

The other edition takes as its starting point the work which in the early nineteenth century still had Allegri's name attached to it on paper, even though much of it had been heavily revised a century earlier. It draws upon a series of manuscripts from the 1820s (discussed in Chapter 9) which give decorations similar to those heard by Mendelssohn, Spohr, Nicolai and others. They were performed and partly created by one of the greatest exponents of the 'high Cs', the *castrato* Don Mariano Padroni. Editorial additions and suggestions are given freely, based on practices found in all the sources hereinafter examined, but particularly those in Mustafà's manuscript. It is my contention that the style shown there had hardly changed for at least a century, and these editions are both for singers who wish to re-create it and for listeners who wish to understand it.

The earliest source so far discovered with evidence of the choir's execution (included in a very particular *Histoire … de la Musique* of 1767) is considered in Chapter 5. Its provenance, however, is uncertain, and it is in many ways untypical of those that follow. More important are three manuscripts treated in detail in Chapter 6 – two of which date from 1798 and the other doubtless from within the following twenty years or so – which can be shown to originate inside the Papal Choir. The performance practice found there is discussed in Chapter 7. Comparing them with later manuscripts, it is striking

---

prodigieux *Miserere*.' Ludovic Celler [*nom de plume* of Ludovic Leclerc], *La Semaine Sainte au Vatican; Etude musicale et pittoresque* (Paris, 1867), 43.

[6] Entitled *The Last Castrato*, the recording was released on CD in 1987 (Pearl 'Opal' PRL9823), with numerous reissues.

how little some aspects of the performing style evolved during the following century. Discussion of their provenance also sheds light on a crucial period in the choir's history, when its very existence was threatened by the Napoleonic invasions of Rome.

In the nineteenth century, the evolution of the choir and its performance habits was heavily bound up with the careers of two of its directors, Giuseppe Baini and Domenico Mustafà, whose stories, together with an assessment of their influence on the institution, are the subjects of Chapters 8 and 11. Chapter 10 examines the only Italian nineteenth-century printed version of 'the Miserere'. This comes, albeit indirectly, from the Vatican, and although it contributes little new in the way of different notes, its preamble on performance matters is highly valuable. It also had a tangential, if unwitting, role in the creation of the 'English Miserere', whose history and evolution is discussed in detail in Chapter 13, together with the place of Psalm 50/51 in the Anglican liturgy.

The threads are drawn together in Part Four, a summary of all the issues of performance practice which have arisen in study of the sources. It seeks not only to explain to modern listeners how it was done, but to modern performers how to recreate it – a handbook for the use of the editions, and a guide to conductors in the preparation of their own interpretations.

PART ONE

THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

1

Context

The College of Papal Singers

THE official name of the choir of the *cappella papale* was the *Collegio dei Cappellani Cantori della Cappella Pontificia* – the College of the Chaplain Singers of the Pontifical Chapel. The Pontifical Chapel was where the Pope presided, and from 1483, when it was inaugurated, this was the Sistine Chapel – the *Cappella Sistina*.[1] Taking its name from Pope Sixtus IV, for whom it was built, it replaced the crumbling *Cappella Magna* of similar proportions. The singers were eventually identified with the space in which they generally sang, and during the nineteenth century became known in English as the Choir of the Sistine Chapel.[2]

Although various groups of singers provided music for papal offices from perhaps as early as the seventh century, notably the *Schola Cantorum*, and much fine music-making doubtless took place during the Avignon papacy in the fourteenth century, the modern history of the Papal Choir effectively begins after the end of the Great Schism in the 1420s. It was definitively re-established in Rome in 1443 by Pope Eugene IV. In the five years from 1479 to 1484, Sixtus IV increased expenditure on the choir by 50 per cent, and its numbers were increased from thirteen to twenty-five.[3] By 1494, under Alex-

[1] From around 1620, offices were sometimes sung in the newly completed Pauline Chapel in the Palazzo Quirinale (then the summer palace of the Popes), the dimensions and layout of which are virtually identical to those of the Sistine, both supposedly reproducing the exact proportions of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Only the placement and size of the *Cantoria* was slightly modified (see pp. 242–3).

[2] The term was possibly invented by Franz Xaver Haberl, editor of the first complete edition of Palestrina's music. What is now called the 'Sistine Chapel Choir' (the *Cappella Musicale Pontificia 'Sistina'*) is an entirely different institution, created at the beginning of the twentieth century after the dissolution of the College of Papal singers. The term 'Papal Choir' is used in this book, translated from the Latin shorthand *Cappella Pontificia* and therefore, like it, capitalised.

[3] See Richard Sherr, '*The Papal Chapel ca.1492–1515 and its Polyphonic Sources*' (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1975). Much of Sherr's later research on the choir can be found in the collection of his articles reprinted in *Music and*

ander VI, numbers had dropped to eighteen, and over the next few decades it was the enthusiasm for music of each pope more than anything else which determined the size of the choir.

In 1545 Pope Paul III drew up its most important constitution, the *Constitutiones Cappellæ Pontificiæ*, which fixed thirty-two as the ideal number of singers.[4] Those on a full salary were known as *partecipanti*. There was also provision for a certain number of *soprannumerarî* – young singers who were paid less and were waiting for a fully salaried place. After twenty-five years' service (extended in 1848 to thirty), the *partecipanti* could retire on full pay, having attained the status of *giubilati*. They could continue to sing if requested, but were under no obligation to do so. Sometimes they were asked to assume a *secondo servizio*, generally for ten years and with an increase in pay. For long periods of the choir's history, and particularly during the nineteenth century, these numbers remained theoretical, and the choir was rarely at full strength. Weekday services were organised on a rota basis, but the full complement was required to be present for all the major feasts.[5]

Musicians in Renaissance Rome and Other Courts (Farnham, 1999), each noted separately in the bibliography. His article in *Grove Music Online* ('Rome', 2: 'The Renaissance'), https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/, is also a valuable resource, as is its bibliography.

[4] Sherr has shown that this constitution was heavily dependent on previous documents in the Vatican archive, one dating from before 1527 and another from between 1530 and 1540. See 'The Singers of the Papal Chapel and Liturgical Ceremonies in the Early Sixteenth Century: Some Documentary Evidence,' in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth,* papers of the 13th Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, ed. P.A. Ramsey, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 18, Binghamton, NY, 1982, 249–64 (reprinted in Sherr, *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome* as article XI), 249–50. Events shortly after 1545, detailed in Sherr, 'Competence and Incompetence in the Papal Choir in the Age of Palestrina,' *Early Music*, 22/4 (November 1994), 607–28 (reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome,* article XIV), imply that twenty-four was soon seen as perhaps a more ideal number.

[5] Sherr ('The Singers of the Papal Chapel', 253) gives a list of the fifty offices of the church year at which the full chapel (Pope, Curia, etc.) was present, taken from the writings of Paride de Grassi, *cerimoniere pontificio* to Pope Leo X (1513–21). All but eight of them took place in the Sistine, and would certainly have required the full choir. (The original *Grassis Diarium* is in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (the Vatican library), Miscellanea, Armadio XII, Nos 17–21, reproduced in *Il diario di Leone X di Paride Grassi*, ed. Mariano Armellini, Rome, 1884).

For much documentation on how the choir functioned, see volumes 4 and 6 of *Storia della Cappella Musicale Pontificia* (vol. 4/1: Claudio Annibaldi, *Il Seicento, 1590–1644* (Rome, 2011); vol. 6: Leopold Kantner and Angela Pachovsky,

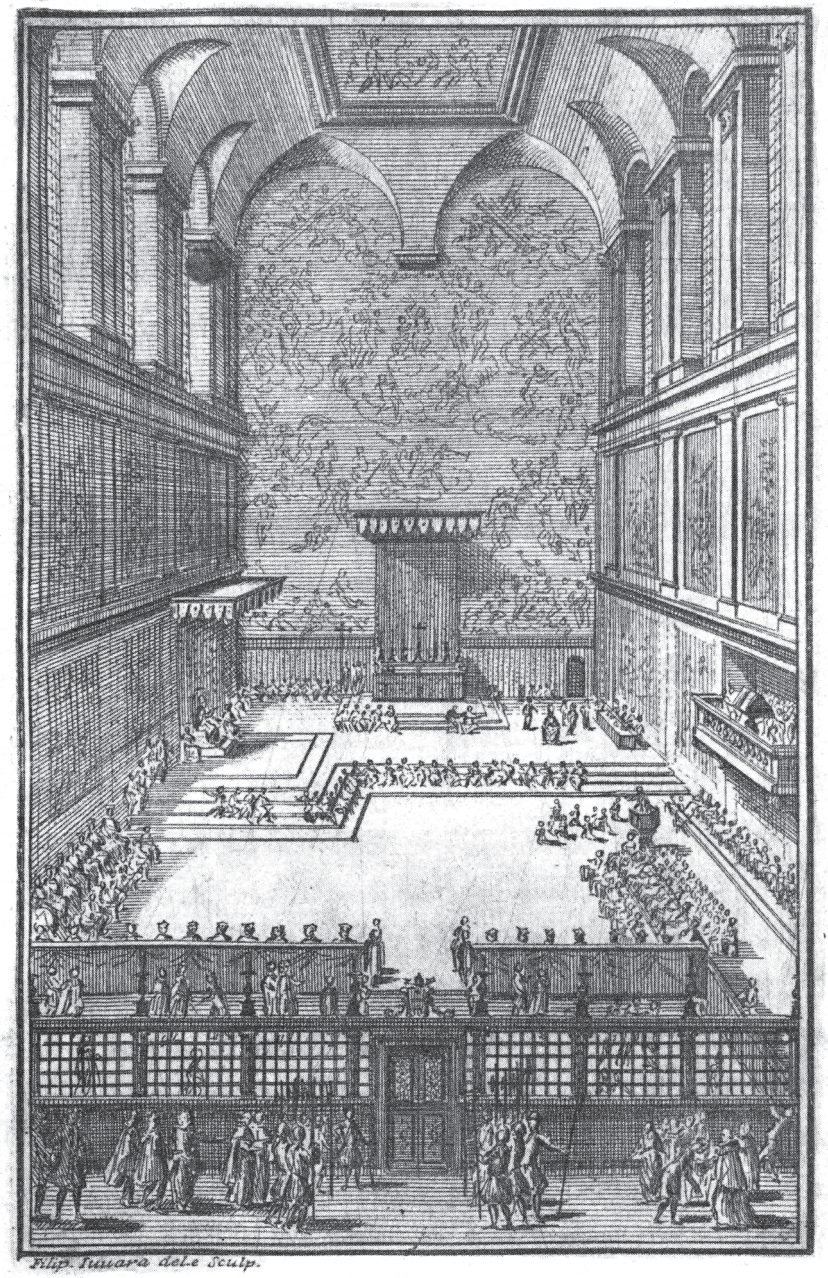

Fig. 1 The Sistine Chapel, engraved by Filippo Juvarra for Andrea Adami's *Osservazioni per ben regolare il coro de i Cantori della Cappella pontificia* (1711). The *Cantoria*, from which the choir always sang, can be seen on the right, with its large double-sided music stand in the middle. The image was re-used by Charles Burney for his volume of Holy Week music published in 1771

The College of Papal singers was unique, or at least exceptional, in a number of ways. Firstly, it sang only in the presence of the Pope, or in his chapel. When he visited other churches, it went with him, displacing any local choir there happened to be. Thus it was that when Pius VI was kidnapped in 1798 by the French, it no longer had any function and was temporarily disbanded.[6] Secondly, in the Sistine Chapel it always sang *a cappella* – unaccompanied.[7] By the second half of the eighteenth century, this made it almost certainly unique (apart perhaps from some closed orders) in the world of Western Christianity. Thirdly, it was composed exclusively of adult singers, the upper parts being sung firstly by falsettists and later by *castrati*.[8] Fourthly, it always numbered composers among its singers: the most famous in the early days were Guillaume Du Fay and Josquin des Pres. Josquin's autograph can still be seen (Fig. 2) carved on the western wall of the *Cantoria*, the gallery where the singers were placed (see the front and back covers and Figs. 1 and 9). Later Palestrina was briefly a member, and Allegri joined in 1629. The fact that some of these composers – including Allegri – were mediocre singers seems to have been accepted as the price to be paid for creating an exclusive repertoire; no doubt with thirty-two singers altogether (albeit often only theoretically), it was felt that the few less able could be carried for the sake of their other talents.

L'Ottocento (Rome, 1998). For a good overview in English, see chapter 5 of Nicholas Clapton, *Moreschi and the Voice of the Castrato* (London, 2008).

[6] See Chapter 6. It was restored in July 1801, when the next Pope, Pius VII, was allowed to enter Rome, but when he in his turn was taken prisoner in July 1809, there was another hiatus, this time until May 1814. A final pause came after the revolutions of 1848 (between November 1848 and April 1850) because of the absence of Pius IX.

[7] This is probably the origin of the term *a cappella*: *alla cappella sistina* – as in the Sistine Chapel, where there has never been an organ. By the eighteenth century, the meaning of the term had evolved to include fairly simple works given with instrumental doubling of the vocal parts, so long as the instrumental parts were not clearly independent. See Jen-yen Chen, 'The Tradition and Ideal of the *Stile Antico* in Viennese Sacred Music, 1740–1800' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000), especially his analysis of Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* of 1725 (20–6), for discussion of this use in Vienna; and Jean-Paul Montagnier, *The Polyphonic Mass in France 1600–1780: The Evidence of the Printed Choirbooks* (Cambridge, 2017) for its application in seventeenth- and -eighteenth-century France. This supplementary meaning never applied to the Papal Choir, and by the late eighteenth century had more or less died out with the end of the style which it described.

[8] According to Sherr ('Rome' in *Grove Music Online*) abortive attempts may have been made in 1425–7 and again in 1436–7 to introduce boys, although it is not certain that all the *pueri* referred to in the documents were children (the term could also designate adolescents or servants).

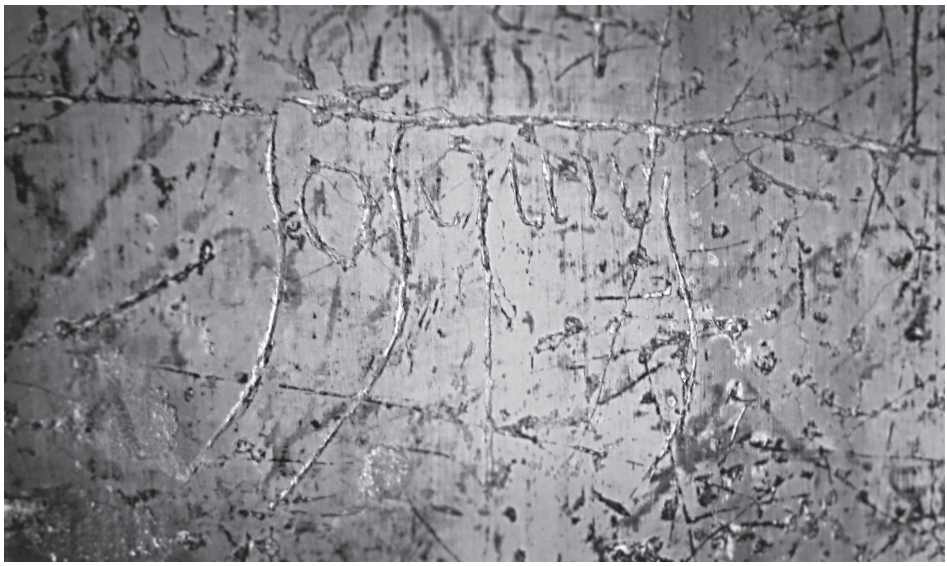

Fig. 2 The signature of Josquin des Prez, carved into the west wall of the *Cantoria* of the Sistine Chapel (photograph by Evan MacCarthy, 2004)

Finally, as a college, it was largely self-governing, a status jealously guarded until the very end in 1905.[9] It elected its own officers and enforced its own discipline. Auditions were conducted before the whole choir, and decided by vote. Although the titular *maestro* was the ecclesiastical administrator of the whole of the *Sacro Palazzo Apostolico*, from 1586 the singers elected every year a *maestro pro tempore* from their number. His function was concerned not with musical direction but with organisation, both of the repertoire and of the singers.[10] Conducting performances in the modern sense was not considered

[9] This date marks the reform of the constitution of the *Cappella*, reinforced by the *Motu Proprio* of 30 June of that year (Kantner and Pachovsky, *L'Ottocento*, 57).

[10] In 1514 or soon afterwards, Pope Leo X named a composer, Eleazar Genet, known as Carpentras, to the post of *maestro*, but this arrangement does not seem to have endured. (See Richard Sherr, 'Ceremonies for Holy Week: Papal Commissions and Madness (?) in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome', in *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood, ed. Jesse Ann Owens and Anthony M. Cummings, Detroit Monographs in Musicology/ Studies in Music 18* (Warren, 1997), 391–403; reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome, a*rticle X, 391–2). The change in 1586 was at the insistence of Pope Sixtus V (one of many reforms he instituted), and the first *maestro pro tempore* was Giovanni Antonio Merlo, the subject of Sherr's 'From the Diary of a 16th Century Papal Singer', *Current Musicology*, 25 (1978), 83–98; reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome*, article IV, esp. 90–1.

necessary, although a *tactus* (essential for singing from choirbooks) could be indicated by the senior singer (*decano*) of the part that began the polyphony. If the music was homophonic it was the *decano* of the basses who gave the *tactus*. He was usually stationed by the little window (or more accurately, a hinged panel in the wooden fretwork; see back cover) to the side of the *Cantoria*, with a view of the altar. Known therefore as the *basso al finestrino*, from this vantage point he could follow the ceremonial and indicate the right moment for the responses, often following cues given by the master of ceremonies stationed close to the celebrant. Once the performance had started, his role was to ensure that its end coincided with that of the ceremonial, for which purpose he would vary the speed of the *tactus*.[11] It will be seen that the functional role of the choir, ensuring the smooth running of the office, was at least as important as its artistic one.[12] No doubt this was one of the reasons that the Pope took it with him when he celebrated mass elsewhere.

The choir also elected a secretary *(segretario-puntatore)* and an administrator-chamberlain (*camerlengo*). The main job of the *puntatore* was to mark unauthorised absences and errors in performance with a black mark (*punto*) against the singer's name, which resulted in fines. He also kept the *Diario della Cappella Sistina* (henceforward *Diario Sistina*, or *DS*), in which, by the eighteenth century, was noted not only *punti* but events in the life of the choir. It is a particularly valuable source for understanding the impact of the Napoleonic invasions of Rome, the subject of Chapter 6. From about 1700 he was nominated in order of seniority; then after holding the post for a year he automatically became *maestro pro tempore*, having effectively functioned as administrative assistant to the previous *maestro.*

Some *maestri* went on to become *camerlengo*, whose job involved liaising with the Vatican authorities – principally the *maestro* and the *maggiordomo-prefetto* of the *Sacro Palazzo Apostolico*. The political skills necessary for this role were not negligible, so it is perhaps not surprising that the *camerlengo*

[11] Grassi included instructions for the choir about this, which on occasions could also involve repeating chants or singing them very slowly (Sherr, 'The Singers of the Papal Chapel', 258). As the celebrant was reading the texts aloud at the same time as the choir was singing them (and the Pope, when present but not officiating, also read certain texts aloud), perfect timing was both largely the responsibility of the choir and very difficult to achieve. See Richard Sherr, 'Speculations on Repertory, Performance Practice, and Ceremony in the Papal Chapel in the Early Sixteenth Century', in *Studien zur Geschichte der papstlichen Kapelle: Tagungsbericht Heidelberg 1989*, Cappellae Apostolicae Sixtinaeque Collectanea Acta Monumenta Collectanea 2, ed. Bernhard Janz (Vatican City, 1994), 103–22; reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome,* article XII, esp. 113–16.

[12] I am grateful to Luciano Luciani, musicologist and former member of the *Cappella Pontificia Musicale 'Sistina',* for his many detailed explanations and elucidations of past and present practice.

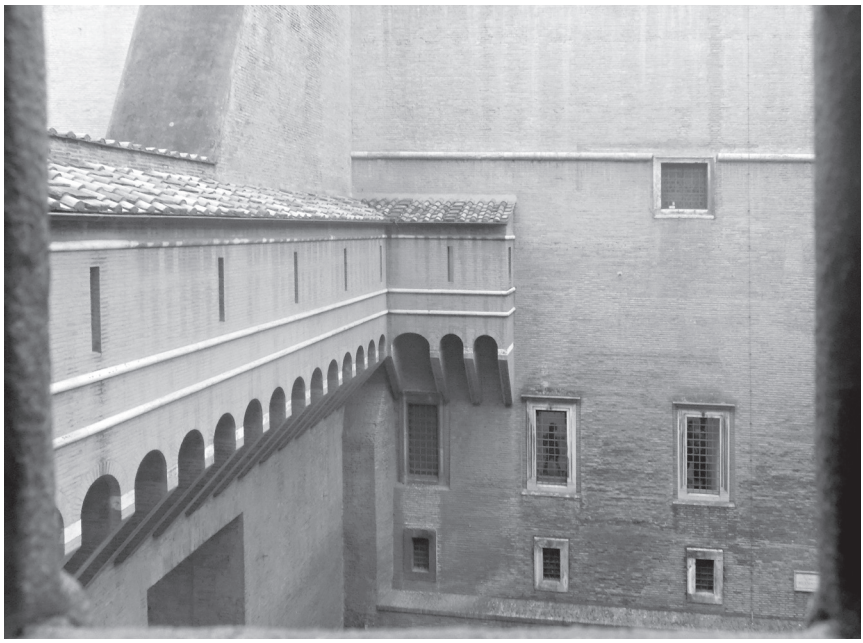

Fig. 3 The northern exterior wall of the Sistine Chapel, showing the enclosed corridor which leads to the singers' entrance into the *Cantoria*. The square window is that in the middle of its back wall, visible on the back cover of this book (photograph by the author)

tended to remain longer in his post.[13] As a result, he became over time in many ways the real master of the choir, as Giovanni Baini did when he was nominated to the post in 1817. In 1830 Baini was referred to as *camerlengo e direttore*, the first time this term had been used, and finally *camerlengo e direttore perpetuo* in 1841.[14] Never before had the choir been led by what could properly be called a *maestro di cappella.*

Voice types

The thirty-two singers of the Papal College comprised four voice types, eight of each. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the top part appears to have been sung by falsettists, known as *alti naturali*, and the second part, generally

[13] The practice of confirming by simple acclamation the continuation in office of a capable *camerlengo* was made official in 1802 (Kantner and Pachovsky, *L'Ottocento*, 22).

[14] Kantner and Pachovsky, *L'Ottocento*, 30.

marked *altus*, by high tenors. The third part was sung by lower tenors: the range was more or less that of the modern baritone, but no doubt their sound was lighter and clearer.[15] Basses needed a solid lower range.[16]

This formation, common in Renaissance music throughout Europe, was brought into question by the availability of *castrati* during the sixteenth century. A *castrato* was a male singer who, as a result of an operation performed shortly before puberty, retained the vocal cords, and hence the *tessitura*, of a boy, allied to the lung capacity of an adult. The use of this practice for musical reasons may date from as early as the fourth century AD in the Eastern Church, whence after surviving in Sicily following the sack of Constantinople in 1204 it was rediscovered early in the sixteenth century, perhaps by the Spanish in their kingdom of Naples.[17] From that moment *castrati* took musical Europe by storm, dominating its opera houses for more than two hundred years. Although their use on the stage hardly survived the end of the eighteenth century, they were found in church choirs throughout Italy and elsewhere until the mid-nineteenth century, and in the Papal Choir they lasted even longer. Seven are visible in a photograph taken in 1898 (Fig. 4), and an end to further recruitment was not officially decreed until 1902.[18]

[15] Confirmation that the *altus* and *tenor* parts were sung by the same kind of voice is provided by the research of Josef Llorens, in 'Cristobal de Morales, cantor en la Capilla Pontificia de Paolo III (1535–1545)', *Anuario musical,* 8 (1953), 39–69, esp. 46. Seeking to know the voice types of all the singers of the Papal Choir in 1544, Llorens noted from the *Diario Sistina* which singers replaced others (some of whose voice types are known) on their days off. By a process of elimination he was able to identify almost all of them. But whereas sopranos only replaced other sopranos, and basses other basses, the singers of the *altus* and *tenor* parts interchanged freely. The reference and explanation is provided in Richard Sherr, 'Performance Practice in the Papal Chapel during the 16th Century', *Early Music,* 15/4 (November 1987), 452–62; reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome*, article XIII, esp. n. 40.

[16] This was still the case in 1640, when Giambattista Doni noted the prevalence in Rome of deep basses, *'da altri finalmente alla copia maggiore de' Bassi profondi, che più quì che altrove, si trovano'*, which contributed to, or perhaps were needed for, the low pitch used there (*Annotazioni sopra il Compendio de' Generi, e de' Modi della Musica,* Rome, 1640, 182).

[17] For interesting information on the earliest instances of their employment in Italy, by Duke Gugliemo Gonzaga in Mantua in the 1550s, and further comment on the origins of these singers and their use in florid secular music, see Richard Sherr, 'Gugliemo Gonzaga and the castrati', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33 (1980), 33–56; reprinted in *Music and Musicians in Renaissance Rome,* article XVI. Matjaž Matošec, '*"Female Voices in Male Bodies": Castrati, Onnagata, and the Performance of Gender through Ambiguous Bodies and Vocal Acts*' (MA thesis, Utrecht University, 2008), 40, contains further discussion and references.

[18] See Clapton, *Moreschi,* 164–5, and Kantner and Pachovsky, *L'Ottocento*, 57. In general *castrati* tended to be either shorter or taller than average, as this

Fig. 4 The Papal Choir in 1898, showing seven *castrati*. *Seated on left*: Domenico Mustafà (numbered 26, 1829–1912); *middle row standing*: Giovanni Cesari (13, 1843–1904), Domenico Salvatori (15, 1855–1909), Alessandro Moreschi (16, 1858–1922) and Vincenzo Sebastianelli (18, 1851–1919); *front row standing*: Gustavo Pesci (24, 1833–1913) and Giuseppe Ritarossi (25, 1841–1902)

The Papal Choir was one of the first institutions to employ *castrati* in Italy. The date of 1562 given above for their first appearance there is taken from John Rosselli, and coincides with the appointment of Francisco Soto de Langa, the first *soprano eunuco* to be acknowledged as such.[19] Rosselli points out that 'Spanish falsettists' recruited for the Papal Choir earlier may have been

photograph shows. Both characteristics were associated with their physical appearance in the eighteenth century.

[19] 'The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550–1850', *Acta Musicologica*, 60/2 (May–August 1988), 143–79. This article was reprinted virtually complete as chapter 2 of Rosselli's *Singers of Italian Opera* (Cambridge, 1992). For a detailed examination of the historical aspects, as well as consideration of the social and philosophical questions surrounding *castrati*, see Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Oakland, CA, 2015), which also includes (in chapter 1 nn. 5 and 6) many further references. Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC, 2003) also contains

undeclared *castrati*.[20] Their presence in the *Cappella Giulia* (the choir of the Basilica of S. Pietro) was authorised by Pope Sixtus V in a Bull dated 1589. This necessitated some mental gymnastics, as members of the choir were required to take minor orders, which were in principle forbidden to *castrati*.[21] The terminology concerning the *castrato* voice is curious and often contradictory, depending largely on the point of view of the writer. Sometimes it is called *forzate* – a 'forced' voice, as opposed to a *voce autentice* or *naturale*; at other times *voce sincero* – genuine, no doubt in contrast to a *falsetto,* a false voice.[22] The term generally employed in the *Diario Sistina* is more down to earth: *soprano evirato.*

Initially the *castrati* in the Papal Choir were restricted to the highest parts, where they quickly replaced most of the *alti naturali.*[23] However, it seems that the higher range offered by the *castrati* soon encouraged the choir to perform some polyphony at a higher pitch.[24] With the *altus* parts (the second highest) thus becoming progressively more difficult for the high tenors, the *alti naturali* were enabled to find themselves a new role. Becoming scarce by the second half of the seventeenth century, they were unofficially boosted in numbers by

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interesting reflections on the latter questions. See also the ends of Chapters 4 and 17 below.

[20] Among them were the Bustamente brothers from Naples, admitted on the same day in 1558 (Enrico Celani, 'I cantori della Cappella Pontificia nei secoli XVI–XVIII', part 2, *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, 14 (1907), 753, and see n. 23 below). Evidence which may show that as early as 1506 singing boys (*caponado*) were being selected for castration at Burgos Cathedral is cited in Simon Ravens, *The Supernatural Voice: A History of High Male Singing* (Woodbridge, 2014), 53.

[21] Bodily mutilation for any purpose other than medical necessity was forbidden by canon law, but this prohibition could be sidelined by treating castration as a kind of sacred sacrifice (see Feldman, *The Castrato*, xii–xv). No doubt it was this interpretation that allowed some of them to become priests or monks in later life (Rosselli, 'The Castrati', 150).

[22] Viadana used this sense when he contrasted *falsetti* with *soprani naturali* (castrati and/or boys) in the preface to his *Centi Concerti ecclesiastici* (Venice, 1602, 3). Even more confusingly, *falsetto* was later used in a technical sense, by Pier-Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantor antichi e moderni* (Bologna, 1723), 14, and his successors, to describe the head register of a voice, as opposed to the *voce di petto*.

[23] According to a manuscript compiled by the papal singer Matteo Fornari, the '*ultimo soprano falsetto'* admitted to the choir was Giovanni Santos, in 1588. Much of Fornari's '*Narrazione istorica dell'origine, progresso et privilegi della Pontificia Cappella … con catalogo dei Cantori … 1749*' is the source for Celani's articles 'I cantori della Cappella Pontificia' in *Rivista Musicale Italiana*: parts 1 and 2 are in vol. 14 (1907), 83–104 and 752–90, and part 3 in vol. 16 (1909), 55–112.

[24] It seems to have been left to the *decani* of the different parts to fix the pitch, but the actual mechanics of how they did so is unclear. See p. 223, n. 21.

the recruitment of *castrati* altos. The voice-range of a *castrato*, like that of a boy or a woman, could of course be high or low, and many of the most famous operatic *castrati* sang mostly in the alto range. The first *castrato* so engaged in the choir was Giovanni Francesco Grossi in 1675, because of '*la scarsezza dei contralti naturali*'.[25] In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were many. As an understanding of pitch changes in performance is vital in the story of the *Miserere*, it will be dealt with fully in Chapter 15.

Repertoire

The hiring of composers during the expansion of the choir under Sixtus IV in the 1480s increased the amount of polyphonic music in the choir's repertoire. Gaspar von Weerbeke, Bertrandus Vaqueras and Marbrianus de Orto were among the most prolific, and they were joined in 1489 by Josquin des Prez. In 1490 a scribe was engaged to copy the music that they had either brought with them or composed in Rome, to be added to older music by Guillaume Du Fay, Antoine Busnois and Johannes Ockeghem, and to more recent additions by Loyset Compère, Heinrich Isaac and Johannes Martini. At the end of the fifteenth century, it can be shown that the choir had a repertoire of 64 masses, 14 mass movements, 54 motets, 14 Magnificats and 76 hymns.[26]

The choir's principal repertoire was however *cantus planus* – Gregorian chant, or plainsong – but they did not always sing it in a plain way. When reciting psalms and canticles, especially on special occasions, harmony was sometimes added to it from the late fifteenth century onwards using the technique of *falsobordone*. Similar in usage, if not method, to *fauxbourdon*, a *falsobordone* is created by the addition of three harmony parts to a psalm-tone, using mostly root-position chords.[27] The origins of the practice may lie in the improvisation

[25] Celani, 'I cantori', part 1, 87 (for the background), and part 3, 65 (for Grossi's career). As *castrati* were officially restricted to the soprano parts, he was listed in the archives as a soprano. Grossi, known as *Siface* after one of his early operatic roles, came to England in 1687, where Henry Purcell wrote a mock lament, *Siface's Farewell*, on his subsequent departure. See pp. 247–8 for John Evelyn's appreciation of his singing.

[26] Jesse Rodin, *Josquin's Rome: Hearing and Composing in the Sistine Chapel* (New York, 2012), 100–1.

[27] According to Otto Nicolai, who spent 1834–6 in Rome as organist of the German Chapel and took great interest in the Papal Choir, *fauxbourdon* – a succession of 6-3 chords, albeit with modified cadences – was still sometimes used for chanting the psalms. Nicolai, ‚Italienische Studien: Über die Sixtinische Capelle in Rom', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 6 (1837), 47 (modern edn in *Musikalische Aufsätze*, ed. G.R. Kruse, Regensburg, 1960). One of Nicolai's examples is reproduced in Richard Boursy, 'Historicism and Composition:

of harmonised cadences to Gregorian chant, known as *more gregoriano* – the Gregorian manner. Writing these cadences down, and concurrently adding chords to the reciting note, was all that was necessary to produce a repertoire of *falsobordoni*. Each of the two sections of each verse is made up of homophonic recitation on that first chord followed by a harmonic cadence – the first generally a half-close (either what would now be called an imperfect cadence, or with a chord on one of the recognised co-finals of the mode of the chant) and the second a full close. A single Anglican psalm chant displays the same principles, with the difference of not generally being composed around a pre-existent melody.

Falsobordone is one of the earliest compositional genres which necessitated thinking vertically (harmonically) rather than horizontally (melodically). It is thus a striking example of 'the monumental change taking place in the late 15th century from successive to simultaneous composition' with its 'clarity of form, *a cappella* style, triadic writing, four-part harmony, homophonic texture (especially in the recitations) and a bass line that moves by 4ths and 5ths.'[28] Usually only alternate verses of a psalm or canticle were sung in *falsobordone*, the others – which could be either the even- or the odd-numbered verses – remaining in *cantus planus*. Allegri's *Miserere* started life as a *falsobordone* setting of Psalm 50.

Giuseppe Baini, the Sistine Chapel Choir, and Stile Antico Music in the First Half of the 19th Century' (vol.1 text, vol.2 transcriptions; PhD diss., Yale University, 1994), 49.

[28] Murray C. Bradshaw, *'Falsobordone', Grove Music Online*, which also contains a bibliography of his extensive writings on the long history and different manifestations of it. Improvising *contrappunto alla mente* on a Gregorian antiphon remained one of the tests undergone by candidates for the choir until 1870 (Kantner and Pachovsky, *L'Ottocento*, 21).

2

Creation

THE year 1513 saw the election of a new pope, Leo X. He was well known for his love of music and the arts, a quality not always looked upon with approval by his contemporaries. In the words of one of the less sympathetic of them, the Sienese canon and diarist Sigismondo Tizio:

> Many were of the opinion that it was bad for the Church that her Head should be absorbed in amusements, music, the chase and buffoonery, instead of being occupied by the thought of the needs of his flock and bewailing its misfortunes.[1]

After the inauguration of the Sistine Chapel in 1483, decoration of it had proceeded at pace, and Michelangelo's vault frescoes were completed in 1512.[2] Leo was thus able to make it the centre of his personal ceremonial in the Vatican, and one of his first decisions was to increase the role of the choir. He decreed that in Holy Week 1514 the *Miserere* at the end of the offices of *Tenebræ* should be sung in a special way, perhaps as an aid to meditation and reflection. *Tenebræ* was already one of the most important religious ceremonies of the church year which took place there; from now on it would be an increasingly important artistic one as well.[3]

[1] 'Male igitur cum ecclesia esse actum multi arbitrabantur, cum ecclesiæ caput cantilenis, musicis, venationibus et delusionibus vacet hominum dementium, cum sapere virum oporteret et suarum ovium calamitatibus miserescere et illacrymari.' *Historiæ Senenses* (Chigi Library, Rome, Cod. G, II., 37, fol. 325), trans. (by R.F. Kerr) in Ludwig Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 7 (London, 1908), 6–7. As Leo was a Medici from Florence, one could hardly expect a Sienese to be the most unbiased of observers. It is nevertheless true that Leo, who reigned until 1521, was said to have used up the income of three papacies – the preceding one and the following one as well as his own – such was his extravagance.

[2] His *Last Judgment* on the west wall, executed between 1536 and 1541, was still in the future.

[3] Leo had already ordered polyphonic settings by Carpentras of the Lamentations of Jeremiah to be sung on all three days of *Tenebræ*, despite the ban on

Tenebræ

Tenebræ was a very ancient office celebrated three times in Holy Week. It was in fact two offices in one, combining Matins and Lauds for the three days known as the *Triduum sacrum:* Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Saturday. From about the thirteenth century, it was celebrated not in the mornings of those days but the preceding evenings: that of Maundy Thursday on Wednesday evening, that of Good Friday on Thursday evening, and that of Easter Saturday on Friday evening. Starting therefore in the late afternoon and finishing after nightfall, it quickly acquired the name *Tenebræ*: shadows, or darkness. The name doubtless also refers to the fifth of the nine Responsories at Matins on Good Friday – 'Tenebræ factæ sunt, dum crucifixissent Jesum Judaei' ('There was darkness when the Jews crucified Jesus'). Matins on these days consists of nine psalms, each with its own lesson (the first three are taken from the Lamentations of Jeremiah), responsory and antiphon. Lauds has four psalms and two canticles. So in the combined office there are fifteen pieces in all: thirteen psalms and two canticles. *Miserere mei, Deus* (Psalm 50 in the Catholic psalter), the most important of the seven Penitential Psalms, is the first psalm at Lauds on the first day.[4] The rubric also required it to be recited 'alte legendo sine nota usque ad finem' ('read out aloud continuously to the end without notes') at the very end of *Tenebræ* on all three days.[5]

No longer part of Catholic liturgy, the office of *Tenebræ* was highly theatrical. A large triangular candelabrum with fifteen candles – called in Italian the *Saetta delle Tenebre* after its shape resembling an arrow-head – was set up beside the altar.[6] To echo the disappearance of the daylight outside with a reduction of illumination inside, a candle was extinguished at the end of each psalm or canticle. The last of the fifteen was the canticle *Benedictus*. In the Papal Chapel, after each of its twelve verses one of the tall candles – six on the altar and six on the rood screen (the *Balustrata*) – was extinguished. Then the

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figural music between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday (Sherr, 'Ceremonies for Holy Week', 396).

[4] Indeed in principle it is the first psalm at Lauds on all penitential days, which no doubt explains why in some uses it was the first psalm on all three days of *Tenebræ*. In this part of the office, it was sung in *cantus planus* like all the other psalms.

[5] Sherr, 'Ceremonies for Holy Week', 397.

[6] The English name for it, the *Tenebræ* hearse, is also descriptive, but of a different aspect. *Hearse* is a variant of Middle English *herse* and Old-Middle French *herce*, a harrow, an ornamental framework over (or under) a coffin – whence its most common modern meaning, also a portcullis; probably derived from Latin *hirsutus*, prickly, and ultimately from Samnite *hirpus*, a wolf (Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, London, 4th edn, 1966, 282). The Latin name is *Candelabrum Tenebræ*.

fifteenth candle at the top of the *Saetta* – the so-called 'Christ candle' made from superior whiter wax – was taken away and hidden behind the altar during the repeat of the antiphon *Traditor autem*.[7] The final antiphon 'Christus factus est pro nobis obediens usque ad mortem' ('Christ is made for us obedient unto death') was said or intoned in almost total darkness. Then the Lord's Prayer was recited in *secret* (privately), the Miserere was read, the 'Christ candle' was brought out from behind the altar, and the office ended in a silence broken only by the sound of the congregation departing.

The Misereres of 1514

Pope Leo's idea of singing the Miserere at the end of the office instead of reciting it seems to have aroused the interest and enthusiasm of the singers straight away. Paride de Grassi recounted the first Misereres of 1514 in his diary, which Giuseppe Baini reproduced in his monumental book on Palestrina.

> Paride Grassi, Leo X's master of ceremonies, has left in his manuscript diary a valuable record of the first year in which our singers began the change whereby they sang the psalm *Miserere* at the end of the office of Tenebræ Matins during Holy Week as a falsobordone. This took place in 1514, during the Pontificate of Leo X. Here are his words: *At the Office of Tenebræ, Wednesday 1514. At the end, the singers chanted the psalm Miserere in a new way; the first verse they sang in harmony, and thereafter [the verses] alternately, and it was well and devoutly done.*[8]

[7] 'At *Tenebræ*, there are always 15 candles mounted on a triangular candelabrum; 7 on the left, 7 on the right, made of yellow wax; and 1 on top, made of white wax. This last, which represents Jesus Christ, is hidden at the end of the *Benedictus* to signify his death, and brought out again after the *Miserere*, to show his resurrection.' ('A Ténèbres, il y a toujours 15 cierges sur un candélabre triangulaire; 7 à gauche, 7 à droite, en cire jaune; 1 en haut, en cire blanche. Ce dernier, qui représente Jésus-Christ, est caché au dernier verset du *Benedictus*, pour signifier la mort, puis après le *Miserere*, on le rapporte pour exprimer la résurrection.') Celler, *La Semaine Sainte*, 39.

[8] 'Paride Grassi, maestro di ceremonie di Leone X, nel suo diario MS, ha segnato la preziosa notizia del primo anno, in cui i nostri cantori modulavano in falsobordone il salmo *Miserere* nel fine dei mattutini delle tenebre nella settimana santa. E fu nell'anno 1514 sotto il pontificato di Leone X. Ecco le di lui parole. *Officium tenebrarum. Die Mercurii 1514. In fine cantores dixerunt psalmum Miserere cum novo modo; nam primum versum cantarunt symphonizando, et deinde alternatim, quod fuit bene et devoto*.' Giuseppe Baini, *Memorie Storico-Critiche della Vita et delle Opere di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina* (Rome, 1828), n. 577 (vol. 2, 194–5). Baini, effectively the director of the Papal

The following day, however, the singers seem to have over-reached themselves. Baini continues:

> The happy outcome of the first evening encouraged both the creator and the performers. They immediately wanted to add more for the Thursday evening, and they merited the following comment: *On Thursday* (continues Grassi's Diary) *at the Tenebræ service, the singers in the end, when they wished to sing in harmony with more learning than sweetness, were not praised.*[9]

So for the third office of *Tenebræ*, on Good Friday, they reverted to the version given on Wednesday.

> Hence on the third evening, they were obliged with shame to return to the first falsobordone. Who was the author of this idea, and of the composition made in this way, I know not.[10]

Andrea Adami, in his important book *Osservazioni per ben regolare il coro de i Cantori della Cappella pontificia* (1711), seems to have noticed only the negative reaction.

> The Great Pontiffs … have always procured for their Chapel the best men in Europe; and these men, seeing the deformity of music in those times, exercised all of their ability to render it in the best form possible, trying whenever possible to create new compositions in the real ecclesiastical style. As proof of this, see the diary of Paride de Grassi in the time of Pope Leo X, in the year 1514, where on Holy Wednesday the singers of the Chapel sang a new *Miserere*, the first verse *Sinfonizando* and the second *Alternando*. And despite the fact that this was pleasing only slightly, or indeed not at all, these men of virtue should nevertheless not be deprived of praise because of this, since for their part they acted with all the necessary diligence.[11]

Choir from 1817 until his death in 1844 (see Chapter 8), is known nowadays largely for his biography of Palestrina, a book which also contains a wealth of generally reliable detail concerning the operation of the College. (It should be noted that Baini's copious footnotes run continuously through the two volumes, but the page numbers restart for vol. 2).

[9] 'Il felice incontro della prima sera incoraggì l'inventore, e gli esecutori. Vollero questi subito nel giovedì sera aggiungere alcuna cosa di più, e meritarono, che si scrivesse di loro così*: Die Jovis* (continua il diario del Grassi) *Officium Tenebrarum. Cantores in fine cum vellent symponizare doctius, quam suavius, non fuerunt laudati.'*

[10] 'Onde la terza sera dovettero tornar con vergogna al primo falsobordone. Chi fosse l'autore di questa invenzione, e di siffatta composizione, nol so.'

[11] 'Li Sommi Pontefici … hanno sempre procurato d'aver per la loro Cappella i migliori soggetti d'Europa, quali conosciuta la deformità della Musica di

Who the creators of the Misereres of 1514 were is impossible to say. It was not usual to write down in the *Diario Sistina* the names of composers whose works were performed, and in any case the relevant volume, and much else, was destroyed by fire during the sack of Rome by Emperor Charles V in 1527. Neither can we tell how much embellishment there may have been. Was the second *Miserere* merely a more decorated version of the first, badly received because the ornamentation was incompetently executed or excessive? Or was it another, more harmonically ambitious, setting? We cannot tell. But it is clear that a desire to 'gild the lily', which would create the myth of 'the Miserere' lasting nearly four hundred years, was present from the very beginning.

By Adami's time, the end of the service had become increasingly formalised. For example, he informs us that the soprano responsible for the *Benedictus* antiphon *Traditor autem* had to make sure that it lasted long enough for the Pope to rise from the floor and kneel in front of the *faldistorio* – the folding chair which could also serve as a *prie-dieu.* Then out of the darkness inside the chapel the final antiphon *Christus factus est* was sung by two high voices in unison. Upon confirmation from the master of ceremonies that the Pope had finished reciting the Lord's Prayer to himself, the *basso al finestrino* signalled to the chosen singers and the *Miserere* began.[12] When it was finished, the Pope

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quei tempi, impiegorno tutta la loro abilità per ridurla nella miglior forma possibile, cercando di quando in quando con nuove composizioni il vero stile Ecclesiastico, come in prova di ciò si legge nel Diario di Paride de Grassi nel Tempo di Papa Leone X nell'anno 1514, che nel Mercordì Santo i Cantori della Cappella cantorno un nuovo *Miserere*, il primo Verso *Sinfonizando*, ed il Secondo *Alternando*, e benche poco, o nulla fosse gradito, non per questo quei virtuosi Uomini deono esser privi di Iode, avendo dal canto loro fatte tutte le necessarie diligenze.' Adami, *Osservazioni*, 36–7. Adami (1663–1742) was a *castrato* singer in the Papal Choir from 1689. His book was still in use in the Papal Choir in the mid-nineteenth century: a copy used by Giovanni Battista Baccellieri when *maestro pro tempore* in 1849–50 shows his interesting manuscript annotations, including those discussed in Chapter 10 below. It is his copy which is published in facsimile by Libreria Musicale Italiana Editrice (Lucca, 1998) with an introduction by Giancarlo Rostirolla.

[12] The full description is taken from Adami (*Osservazioni*, 35–36), the same source subsequently used by Burney for his famous account in *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*. It reads: 'Tutte le Antifone si intonano da i Soprani, e l'Anziano di essi avvisa di mano in mano quei Soprani che vuole che l'intonino; egli però deve intonare la prima d'ogni Mattutino, la prima delle Laudi, e quella del *Benedictus*. L'ultimo Verso del *Benedictus* và terminato, quando è smorzata l'ultima candela dell'Altare, e l'ultima Torcia della Balaustrata, ed immediatemente da i due Soprano Anziani si dee intonare la repetizione dell' Antifona *Traditor autem*, che deve durare fin tanto, che il Papa sceso dal Soglio siasi inginocchiato avanti al Faldistorio, ed allora il Signor Maestro deve far cenno alli due Soprani Anziani, che subito intoneranno il Verso *Christus Factus est* nel qual tempo dovrà egli far preparare i Cantori