



Messiaen's Birds

Author(s): Roger Nichols

Source: *Music & Letters*, Vol. 53, No. 2, (Apr., 1972), pp. 233-234

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/733648>

Accessed: 22/07/2008 05:49

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CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of 'Music & Letters'

THE VIOL CONSORT ORGAN BOOK

Sir,

Your reviewer of the Jenkins 'Consort Music in Five Parts' (October 1971, p. 448) would dispense with the separate organ book on grounds of cost, and allow the organ part to appear only under the full score. So would her colleague on the *Musical Times* (June 1971, p. 591). I beg leave to state a case for the defence of the consort organ book, which is:

(a) In general the seventeenth-century organ part to a viol consort had no musical identity distinct from that of the score: for all the organist's practical purposes it was the score.

(b) Although the simultaneous presentation of full score and organ part may be of some collative value to a scholar, its effect upon the organist is merely to burden him with two scores.

(c) There is much practical value to the organist in having each fantasy visible in its entirety at a single opening: no one likes page-turning for its own sake. Nearly all seventeenth-century organ parts to viol consorts were laid out in this way, in a separate book; contemporary consumer-testing must have yielded results similar to mine.

(d) Present-day consumers who cannot readily recruit five-part consorts are already learning what excellent value this compact and handy Jenkins organ book can be at their own solo keyboards; some may well wish to have bought that and nothing else. My copy always lives on or near our domestic clavichord.

I have seen little evidence that viol-consort organ parts were the work of composers (William Lawes excepted); I have seen evidence that some may have been the work of arrangers (e.g. there are four distinct organ parts to William White's Fantasy à 5, Meyer No. 1). The score, therefore, does not necessarily gain extra authenticity from having an organ part printed beneath it. Thus, perhaps, we should moderate our excitement at the discovery of discrepancies. For practical people the least essential item among those provided may well be what your reviewer so revealingly calls the 'study score'. The only use to which mine has been put is the interpretation of the *minutiae* of published reviews: the string parts and organ book have given me much better value for money.

7 Wychwood Avenue,
Canons Park,
Edgware, Middlesex HA8 6TL.
30 November 1971.

GORDON DODD.

MESSIAEN'S BIRDS

Sir,

In his article 'Messiaen's Birds' (April 1971) Trevor Hold levels several charges against the composer, not least that of dishonesty: "He builds up, in all his bird-pieces, this mystique of authenticity. As we shall see, what he says and what he does do not necessarily tally".

Although I applaud Mr. Hold's concern that Messiaen should not go down in the history books as an unimaginative plagiarist, I cannot help feeling that he is being a shade ruthless in interpreting Messiaen's use of such words as 'authentic' and 'exact'. On pp. 113-14 of Claude Samuel's 'Entretiens avec Olivier Messiaen' (Paris, 1967) the composer says:

Je suis obligé de supprimer des intervalles très petits que nos instruments ne peuvent pas exécuter. Je remplace ces intervalles de l'ordre d'un ou deux commas par des demi-tons, mais je respecte l'échelle des valeurs entre les différents intervalles . . . ; tout est agrandi mais les rapports restent identiques et, par conséquent, ce que je restitue est tout de même exact.

The lines between a 'reproduction', an 'imitation' and a 'reworking' are necessarily indistinct and, while Messiaen may not always, in his enthusiasm, have regarded them with perfect scrupulosity, I think another passage from the same book (pp. 111–12) deserves to be quoted in this context:

Je suis personnellement très fier de l'exactitude de mon travail; peut-être ai-je tort, parce que les personnes qui connaissent vraiment les oiseaux peuvent ne pas les reconnaître dans ma musique, et pourtant je vous certifie que tout est vrai, mais, évidemment, c'est moi qui entends et, involontairement, j'introduis quelque chose de ma manière, de ma façon d'écouter et de reproduire les chants.

St. Michael's College,

ROGER NICHOLS.

Tembury Wells,

Worcestershire.

18 January 1972.

F ♯ IN CACCINI

Sir,

Your reviewer of a new edition of Caccini's 'Le nuove musiche' (January 1972, p. 93) asserts without further comment that the famous cadence in one of the composer's introductory illustrations should be, in effect, a plain cadence in E minor: B (with F ♯) to E. Caccini's printer has, however, put an F ♯, which when well sung not only makes a fine cadence arguably in the spirit of the words concerned but is not at all out of place in that period especially in such a (temporary) key. The question, then, is whether before a note—and not merely a figure/sign in a continuo bass-line—a ♯ is indeed "a seventeenth-century alternative symbol for the ♯". Are there further examples to suggest this in such a context?

St. Cecilia's Hall,

PETER WILLIAMS.

Niddry Street,

Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1LJ.

5 February 1972.

Our reviewer writes:

There are two further examples of the use of the ♯ sign in 'Le nuove musiche': (1) 'Queste lagrim'amare' (top of p. 4 in the original), at the words 'chi more', where there is V-I cadence on E and the penultimate note for the voice (F) is marked ♯; (2) 'Perfidissimo volto' (p. 9, second line), at the words 'troppo rio', where there is a V-I cadence on A and the penultimate note for the voice (B) is marked ♯ to contradict the key-signature of B ♭. In Caccini's time the function of the ♯, in accordance with its derivation from *b quadratum*, was to sharpen certain notes that would otherwise be flat or natural. As Morley says, in his explanation of the 'cliefes' (p. 3), "the *b* cliefe . . . is made thus *b* or thus ♯ the one signifying the halfe note and flatt singing: the other signifying the whole note or sharpe singing". In other words the sign meant that you were to sing *mi* instead of *fa*. By analogy with its original purpose of indicating B ♯ instead of B ♭ it was used also to indicate E ♯ instead of E ♭ (e.g. in the *cantus* of Schütz's 'Domine, ne in furore tuo', SWV.85) and F ♯ instead of F ♯. Kroyer, 'Die Anfänge der Chromatik im italienischen Madrigal des XVI. Jahrhunderts', p. 124, quotes a passage from Alessandro Romano's madrigal 'Se tra le neve', where F preceding B is marked ♯ (i.e. F ♯) to avoid the tritone. The sign for flattening a note that would otherwise be sharp was ♭. See also Johannes Wolf, 'Handbuch der Notationskunde', i, p. 436.