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Machaut's Mass

An Introduction



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TO ANNA

PREFACE

GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT's *Messe de Nostre Dame* has some of the qualities of the great neolithic circle at Stonehenge. It functions as an imposing vehicle for worship; for its creator it represents a triumph of construction; while to us it is a work whose magnificence dwarfs all that survives of its age. And yet, while Stonehenge has been excavated, analysed, dated and interpreted—many times over—Machaut's Mass remains largely untouched. Its date is uncertain, its purpose unclear; its construction is understood at only the most visible levels; it awaits analysis, interpretation and—above all—convincing restoration. Its challenge is irresistible.

This book can offer no more than a preliminary excavation, cutting trenches across the site through features which look as if they might prove interesting. What turns up is thus nothing but a sample of the evidence which may survive, the hypotheses constructed around it no more than proposals for further investigation. Chapter 1 draws a biographical sketch of the composer and attempts to fit the Mass into it, supporting an earlier guess at the work's original function. Chapters 2 and 3 look from different angles at its composition, first in terms of form and then from the viewpoint of technique. Chapter 4 examines the result, asking if it is one piece or several, and suggests a range of dates. The Appendix supports a new edition which (perhaps inappropriately) is printed at the end.

The text should, I hope, be comprehensible to anyone who can read music. I have tried to explain technical terms when they first appear, and I therefore beg the indulgence of those experts for whom the preliminary sections are too simple. Later, especially in Chapter 3, there are unavoidable stretches of close analysis setting out evidence for broader conclusions, and these have been printed in smaller type to enable the general reader to skip to the next main point.

Reference is made throughout the text to the bar numbers of the accompanying edition. The pitch system is the usual c - b , c' (= middle C) - b' , c'' , with capital letters for pitch-classes (C = any C, and so on).

To friends and colleagues I owe more debts than I can decently mention; but I hope that at least those thanked below will forgive me for associating them with what follows: they are certainly not to blame for its faults.

My longest-running debt is to Richard Andrewes and the staff of the Pendlebury Library, Cambridge, who over the years have provided assistance far beyond the call of duty. I wish to thank also the staff at the Archives Départementales and the Bibliothèque Municipale in Reims, and M. François Avril and the staff of the Salle des Manuscrits at the Bibliothèque Nationale for allowing me exceptional access to the Machaut manuscripts. Musicologists are the most generous of scholars, and I have received materials and ideas from a great many colleagues, not least Margaret Bent, Christian Berger, John Caldwell, Tim Carter, Liane Curtis, Lawrence Earp, David Fallows, Sarah Fuller, Maria Carmen Gómez, David Hiley, Jehoash Hirshberg, Peter Lefferts, Christopher Page, Richard Rastall, Brian Trowell, Reinhard Strohm, Andrew Wathey, Nigel Wilkins and Laurence Wright. I owe an especial debt of gratitude to Stanley Boorman and Iain Fenlon. My colleagues and students at Southampton have been more understanding of my divided loyalties than the inequality of the division deserved. And the University of Southampton, The Queen's University of Belfast, and Churchill College, Cambridge have generously provided financial support.

D.L.-W.

ABBREVIATIONS

A	F-Pn 1584
abbr.	abbreviation
add	addition, added
af	after
ambig	ambiguous
aug	augmented
AI	Agnus I
AII	Agnus II
AIII	Agnus III
B	F-Pn 1585
b.	bar
bb.	bars
bf	before
br	breve
C	F-Pn 1586
cf.	compare
ch	changed
Cr	Credo
CrA	Credo Amen
CT	Contratenor
dim	diminished
E	F-Pn 9221
F-Pn	France, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, MS no.
fo.	folio
fos.	folios
G	F-Pn 22546
Gl	Gloria
GlA	Gloria Amen
I	Ite
I-Pu	Italy, Padua, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS no.
KI	Kyrie I
KII	Kyrie II
KIII	Kyrie III
Lbl Add.	London, British Library, Additional MS
lig	ligature
m	minim
max	maxima
Mo	Motetus
MS	manuscript

MSS	manuscripts
om	omitted
pd	punctus divisionis
pl	plicated, plica
r	rest (or recto if attached to a folio number)
Rad	Reims, Archives départementales de la Marne, Annexe de Reims, MS
Rbm	Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS
S	Sanctus
sb	semibreve
T	Tenor
Tr	Triplum
US-NYw	United States of America, New York, Wildenstein Galleries
v	verso
Vg	US-NYw, callmark unknown (formerly owned by the Marquis de Vogüé)
X	Christe

CONTENTS

Abbreviations	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: MACHAUT AND THE MASS	I
1.1 Machaut	I
1.2 Machaut's Mass	7
1.2.1 Introduction	7
1.2.2 Date	8
1.2.3 Function	8
CHAPTER 2: CONSTRUCTION	14
2.1 Formal choices	14
2.1.1 Introduction	14
2.1.2 The fourteenth-century tradition	14
2.2 Kyrie	17
2.2.1 Introduction	17
2.2.2 Chant	18
2.2.3 Kyrie I	19
2.2.4 Christe	24
2.2.5 Kyrie II and III	27
2.2.6 Conclusion	29
2.3 Gloria and Credo	29
2.3.1 Introduction	29
2.3.2 Gloria	30
2.3.2.1 Gloria Amen	37
2.3.3 Credo	38
2.3.3.1 Credo Amen	43
2.4 Sanctus	45
2.5 Agnus Dei	49
2.6 Ite Missa Est	51
2.7 Conclusion	52

CHAPTER 3: ELABORATION	54
3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 Four-part conception and composition	54
3.2.1 The problem	54
3.2.2 Gloria and Credo	56
3.2.3 The isorhythmic movements	69
3.3 Prolongations	72
CHAPTER 4: COHERENCE	80
4.1 Introduction	80
4.2 Mode change	81
4.3 Lower-voice counterpoint	82
4.4 Four-part harmony	83
4.4.1 Dissonance control	83
4.4.2 Changing dissonance treatment	84
4.4.3 Consistent dissonance treatment	85
4.5 Rhythmic coherence	87
4.6 Motives?	89
4.7 Quotations?	90
4.8 Developments	92
4.9 Satellite works	92
4.10 Conclusion	95
APPENDIX: INTRODUCTION TO THE EDITION	96
A.1 Sources	96
A.2 Establishing Machaut's text	96
A.3 Sharps	98
A.4 Plicas	103
A.5 Transcription	105
A.6 Texting	106
A.7 Pronunciation	110
A.8 Voice types and performance style	114
A.9 Liturgical reconstructions	118

CRITICAL NOTES	120
Kyrie I	121
Christe	123
Kyrie II	126
Kyrie III	128
Gloria	131
Gloria Amen	137
Credo	139
Credo Amen	150
Sanctus	153
Agnus I	160
Agnus II	162
Agnus III	165
Ite	167
Bibliography	171
Index	177
<i>La Messe de Nostre Dame</i>	181

I

INTRODUCTION

MACHAUT AND THE MASS

1.1 Machaut

Guillaume de Machaut exists mainly in our imagination, a fate which would probably have delighted him.¹ His remains—documentary, literary and musical—for all their extraordinary variety and the networks of international relationships which they suggest, offer us few hard facts on which to base a picture of the man and his life.² We have no date of birth. That he died in 1377 and that his earliest known employment can be traced back to about 1323 have led to a convenient assumption that he must have been born around 1300, though he could have been several years younger or even older. The first surviving reports of his existence dates only from 1331. This is a Bull (or edict) of Pope John XXII, sealed at Avignon on 30 July 1331, which declares that Machaut shall become a canon of Verulam Cathedral when a position becomes vacant. The Pope agrees to this at the request of John, King of Bohemia, for whom (the Bull records) Machaut is clerk and almoner.³ Similar documents of 17 April 1332 and 4 January 1333 promise him further canonries at Arras and Reims cathedrals, varying their descriptions of Machaut slightly to include notary and secretary amongst his roles in John of Bohemia's household.⁴

These are typical documents of their time. The Pope graciously favours a secular ruler by agreeing that at some time in the future

¹ On 14-century imagination, and Machaut's in particular, see Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison, 1978).

² The most detailed published biography is Armand Machabey, *Guillaume de Machaut, 1302-1377: La Vie et L'Oeuvre Musical* (Paris, 1955). In what follows, those documents which I have consulted are footnoted by their current shelf-mark. Otherwise, references are to the fullest published treatment.

³ The Bull is published and discussed in Antoine Thomas, 'Extraits des archives du Vatican pour servir à l'histoire littéraire', *Romania*, 10 (1881), 328, 330-1.

⁴ Thomas, op. cit., pp. 328-9, 331-2.

one of his employees may enjoy additional income from some other (ecclesiastical) institution. Everyone, except possibly the institution providing the goods, benefited from the system. The Pope, at no expense to himself, placed the King in his debt; the King secured the possibility of reward for his secretary, and the secretary could look forward to increased income and to the possibility that, should circumstances change, he could always retire to the community of which he would be nominally a canon but in which—and here was the beauty of the arrangement—he was by no means obliged to reside in order to draw his salary.⁵

By 1333, then, Machaut was looking forward to enjoying no fewer than three cathedral canonries, in addition to a chaplaincy at Houdain which, the 1332 Bull reveals, he already held. None of these expected positions had, however, become vacant by 17 April 1335 when the new Pope, Benedict XII, as part of an attempt to curb the absurdities of the benefice system, sealed a Bull rationalising Machaut's holdings. This allowed him to keep the promised canonry at Reims in return for surrendering those at Arras and Verdun immediately, and for giving up the chaplaincy at Houdain when a position at Reims became vacant. However, Machaut was permitted to keep an income from the church at Saint-Quentin, which he had acquired (for once) without papal intervention.⁶

Machaut's turn eventually came at Reims in 1337 when, on 29 January, he was received as canon 'by procuration', which indicates that he was not there in person.⁷ He cannot, however, have been entirely absent throughout the remaining years of his royal employment, since his presence is recorded twice in Reims documents over the next few years:⁸ on 13 April 1340 he was

⁵ For more information on the benefice system as used to support musicians see Craig Wright, *Music at the Court of Burgundy 1364-1419* (Henryville, 1979) pp. 66-9, 85.

⁶ Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 329, 332-3. An 18th-century MS in Reims (the 'Weyen' MS), compiled in part from medieval documents now lost, implies that the cathedral Chapter recorded Machaut's nomination on 1 August 1331 and 16 June 1335. The latter date would fit with that of Benedict's Bull; the former remains mysterious but may refer to an earlier stage in the appointment process. Rbm 1773, fo. 400^r, also fo. 284^r.

⁷ Rad 2.G.1650, fo. 54^r. This is the 'Livre Rouge' to which Machabey refers, apparently following Varin.

⁸ Perhaps relevant to these years is Rad 2.G.321, pièce 13, fo. 1, a fragmentary summary of canon law with respect to a person who, received as a canon of Reims, continues to serve another patron. It dates from around the 1330s and may refer specifically to the case of Machaut.

present to witness the installation oath of Jean de Vienne as Archbishop of Reims,⁹ and on 30 May 1344 he witnessed a land transfer between the abbot of St Rémi de Reims and John of Bohemia.¹⁰ On the other hand, the inclusion of his name in a salary list (he was paid the standard canon's stipend of 60 *livres*) dated 25 May and 1 November 1346 tells us nothing of his whereabouts.¹¹

It is probable, however, that by about this date Machaut had settled permanently in Reims; for it was on 26 August 1346 that John of Bohemia died at the battle of Crécy. His was one of the more glorious deaths of the fourteenth century. Blind, but determined to fight,

the King said a very brave thing to his knights: 'My lords, you are my men, my friends and my companions-in-arms. Today I have a special request to make of you. Take me far enough forward for me to strike a blow with my sword.'

Because they cherished his honour and their own prowess, his knights consented. . . . In order to acquit themselves well and not lose the king in the press, they tied all their horses together by the bridles, set their king in front so that he might fulfil his wish, and rode towards the enemy. . . . The good king . . . came so close to the enemy that he was able to use his sword several times and fought most bravely, as did the knights with him. They advanced so far forward that they all remained on the field, not one escaping alive. They were found the next day lying round their leader, with their horses still fastened together.¹²

If these are the bare facts of the first available slice of Machaut's life, what can we deduce from them about his background and about the kind of life he led up to that point?

The Bull of April 1335 mentions that Machaut had served John of Bohemia for 'twelve years or thereabouts', which takes us back to 1322 or 23. Clearly, by that date he must already have been exceptionally educated for his time, able to read and write elegantly in Latin and French, drafting the letters and financial and legal documents that were the day to day business of the secretary to a great landowner. Such an education could only have begun in an ecclesiastical institution. We have no clue as to which one, beyond a fifteenth-century suggestion that he was

⁹ Rad 2.G.323, pièce 13.

¹⁰ Rad 56.H.74, pièce A, fo. 30^r.

¹¹ Rad 2.G.1650, fo. 269bis^r.

¹² Froissart, *Chronicles*, tr. Geoffrey Brereton, rev. edn. (Harmondsworth, 1978), pp. 89-90.

born in Champagne.¹³ It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that the village of Machaut, 39 km. north-east of Reims, must have been his birthplace, and that therefore Reims cathedral is the obvious site for his early education; but (despite the confidence of the local tourist board) it is a larger jump than the evidence will allow. An early connection with Reims is nevertheless hinted at by the motet, *Bone pastor*, whose text celebrates a Reims-based pastor Guillaume, the only candidate for whom seems to be Guillaume de Trie, Archbishop from 1324 to 1334.

It is hard to believe, though, that any provincial cathedral could have offered Machaut the exposure to new developments in literature and music which his earliest surviving works show him already to have enjoyed. He must surely have spent some time in Paris. This would seem the most likely explanation for his early adoption of *Ars nova* compositional techniques,¹⁴ and in particular for direct modelling of at least one early work on an existing motet by the originator of the new style, the Paris-based Philippe de Vitry.¹⁵

Whatever his early circumstances, they must have changed dramatically once he entered the service of John of Bohemia. The king was an obsessive traveller, moving back and forth between his possessions in France, Luxembourg and Eastern Europe with such frequency that most years included at least one visit to each. In addition, during the years in which Machaut was his secretary, he campaigned in Germany, Austria, Silesia and as far as Lithuania, as well as undertaking diplomatic missions in France and Italy.¹⁶ And however unpleasant Machaut found the hardships of

¹³ Machabey, op. cit., p. 15. His pupil Eustache Deschamps also lists Machaut amongst the poets of Champagne: A. Coville, 'Philippe de Vitry: Notes biographiques', *Romania*, 59 (1933), 521.

¹⁴ *Bone pastor* is one of the clearest examples of the influence of Philippe de Vitry's motet style.

¹⁵ The relationship of Machaut's motet *Aucune gent/Qui plus aime/Fiat voluntas tua/CT* to Vitry's *Douce playsence/Garison selon nature/Neuma quinti toni* is summarised in Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Related Motets from Fourteenth-Century France', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 109 (1982-3), p. 5, and discussed in detail in Leech-Wilkinson, 'Compositional Procedure in the Four-Part Isorhythmic Works of Philippe de Vitry and his Contemporaries' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1983), published (without chapter 5) as *Compositional Techniques in the Four-Part Isorhythmic Motets of Philippe de Vitry and his Contemporaries* (New York, 1989), ch. 2.

¹⁶ Machabey, op. cit., pp. 19-34.

these continual expeditions, they must at least have made him into one of the most widely travelled clerks of his time.

It is probably not coincidence that as John was increasingly incapacitated by blindness during the 1340s, so we begin to find references to Machaut's presence in Reims as a resident canon. It is worth remembering that he must himself have been nearing, if not already in, his 40s by now—in medieval terms, approaching old age—so that the sedentary life of a cathedral canon must have seemed increasingly attractive.

Thus on 1 January 1352 we find him witnessing the installation oath of Archbishop Hugues d'Arcy, and likewise that of Jean de Craon on 4 November 1355; but that he was not confined entirely to Reims is suggested by his absence from similar ceremonies on 2 May 1353 and 29 December 1374.¹⁷

In December 1361 Machaut's house was used by the visiting Charles, Duke of Normandy, then regent of France, while he attempted to sort out a quarrel between the Archbishop and City concerning the city defences.¹⁸ Reims had already been under siege by the English in 1359–60, a calamity which may perhaps underlie the texts of Machaut's last three motets.¹⁹ In 1364 he was assessed for taxes payable on a property in the parish of St Timothée in Reims, which, if nothing else, suggests that he was not penniless.²⁰ The impression is reinforced by a payment of 300 gold francs from the Count of Savoy in 1371 in return for a manuscript romance,²¹ and by a record of a business transaction on 15 October of the same year.²² Then in 1372 we find Machaut living in a sizeable canonical residence just to the south of the west end of the cathedral (in the present Rue d'Anjou),²³ after which nothing survives until the appointment of his successor, Johannes

¹⁷ Respectively, Rad 2.G.323, pièce 15, pièce 17, pièce 16 and Rbm 1780, pp. 75–7. Pierre Varin, *Archives Administratives de la Ville de Reims*, iii (Paris, 1848), p. 31 n. 1, transcribes a further reference, dated 18 August 1352.

¹⁸ Rbm 1628, fo. 236', part of the *Mémoires* of Jean Rogier, is the earliest source I have traced.

¹⁹ Leech-Wilkinson, *Compositional Techniques*, pp. 105–7.

²⁰ Rad 2.G.191, pièce 1, fo. 141'. As far as I know, this document has not been previously noted.

²¹ Machabey, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²³ Rad 2.G.318, pièce 5, discussed in Marie-Édith Brejon de Lavergnée. 'Note sur la maison de Guillaume de Machaut à Reims', in *Guillaume de Machaut, Poète et Compositeur* (no ed.; Actes et Colloques, 23; Paris, 1982), pp. 149–52.

Gibourti, who is received in person as occupant of Machaut's prebend, on 9 November 1377.²⁴

None of this material (except in so far as it is influenced by John of Bohemia) is especially surprising or so exceptional as to set Machaut apart from men of similar rank in other noble households. The most obvious comparison, with Philippe de Vitry, whose career began in a similar fashion at the French court, makes Machaut appear a rather unremarkable figure. Vitry probably started as a clerk in the royal household, but is first heard of in surviving documents as a notary under Charles le Bel (1322–8). By the age of 50, however, when Machaut had already retired to Reims, Vitry had become one of the most powerful figures in the French establishment, a valued aide to the future King Jean II, under whom he was duly rewarded with the bishopric of Meaux.²⁵ Like Machaut, Vitry composed—indeed his musical innovations were largely responsible for the character of French music for most of the rest of the century—and like Machaut he wrote poetry, both short *formes fixes* and larger narrative works. But if in their origins and in their literary and musical interests the two composers seem to be comparable, in terms of political and intellectual achievement Vitry is by far the more significant figure.

Why is it, then, that to the student of medieval literature and music Machaut seems so much more engaging? Certainly the ageing canon of Reims who exchanges love-letters and lyrics with his young admirer Péronne d'Armentières seems altogether more sympathetic a character than the political schemer who supports crooked administrators and lives under the protection of German bodyguards.²⁶ Perhaps also the richness and idiosyncrasy of Machaut's musical and poetic languages seem more intriguing than does the classical perfection of Vitry's surviving motets.

But the main reason for Machaut's comparative fame today is more prosaic. Exceptionally amongst composers (though not

²⁴ Rad 2.G.1650, fo. 54^r. The Weyen MS records that Machaut died in April 1377: Rbm 1773, fo. 284^r.

²⁵ A. Coville, 'Philippe de Vitry: Notes biographiques', *Romania*, 59 (1933), 520–47, remains the fullest study of Vitry's life. See also Leo Schrade, 'Philippe de Vitry: Some New Discoveries', *Musical Quarterly*, 42 (1956), 330–54.

²⁶ On Machaut's correspondence with Péronne, see initially Sarah Jane Williams, 'The Lady, the Lyrics and the Letters', *Early Music*, 5 (1977), 462–8. For this view of Vitry see Alexander Blachly, 'The Motets of Philippe de Vitry' (unpub. Master's diss., Columbia University, 1971), pp. 13–15.

poets) of the fourteenth-century *Ars nova*, Machaut saw to it that his complete works, both literary and musical, were collected together and copied into beautifully written and illustrated manuscripts for the benefit of his wealthy patrons. Because these manuscripts were so costly many were carefully preserved long after their contents had passed from fashion. And being unfashionable, and therefore largely unopened, several survived in near original condition up to the beginning of the present century.

Thus while only about a dozen of Vitry's compositions are known to survive today—still the most by any other *Ars nova* composer—of Machaut's we have 143, very possibly his entire musical output. This extraordinary fact has constantly to be born in mind in assessing Machaut's relationship with the rest of fourteenth-century music, not least in dealing with the apparently unique *Messe de Nostre Dame*.

1.2 Machaut's Mass

1.2.1 Introduction

Machaut's Mass has often been praised as unique. Richard Hoppin, in his standard history of medieval music, writes that 'It is his largest single musical work and the only one with a strictly liturgical function. . . . It is the first complete setting of the Ordinary that is known to have been written as a unit by one composer. In length it far exceeds any of the compilations of individual movements that make up other Masses in the fourteenth century. Machaut's Mass was the only one of its kind, and not until some fifty years after his death did complete masses begin to appear in the works of early Renaissance composers.'²⁷ But claims like this are only valid if we assume that what survives of fourteenth-century music is representative of what was written. Machaut's Mass is unique not because it was the only one of its kind—we cannot know that—but because it is the only one amongst those pieces which we still possess. Exactly how it relates to those other 'compilations of individual movements' will be considered during Chapter 2. But before we can proceed we must attempt to face the equally difficult historical problem of its

²⁷ Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New York, 1978), pp. 414–5.