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Hyun-Ah Kim. 2008. *Humanism and the Reform of Sacred Music in Early Modern England: John Merbecke the Orator and The Booke of Common Praier Noted (1550)*. Aldershot: Ashgate. xviii + 239 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6268-6 (hardcover)

Barbara Swanson

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The sixteenth-century English composer and organist John Merbecke (ca. 1505–ca. 1585) was an exact contemporary of Thomas Tallis and overlapped with other major composers of the era including John Taverner, John Sheppard, and William Byrd. He is best known today for his mass ordinary setting, sung widely in Anglican churches to an organ accompaniment by Healey Willan. The significance of John Merbecke's reform-minded plainchant has long been contested, although it is now regarded as quintessentially Anglican. Within a few years of creating English-language chant for the newly emerging Anglican church, a regime change (from Protestant back to Catholic) rendered his plainsong obsolete. And although revived and revered by the Anglo-Catholics of the nineteenth century, Merbecke's work has engendered debate among musicologists. In 1918, R. R. Terry uncovered Merbecke's Sarum models and declared that he was unconvinced by Merbecke's English-language adaptations. In the 1970s, scholars such as Herbert Byard and John Aplin denigrated Merbecke's reform of plainsong as "hurriedly composed" and "tentative and at best imitative."[1] And in 1978, Robin Leaver reframed Merbecke's role in plainsong and Reformation history by drawing connections with Luther's *Deutsche Messe*. Hyun-Ah Kim's recent contribution to Merbecke research provides a convincing and indeed exciting new framework—Merbecke as humanist and musical orator—for re-examining Merbecke's significance to both the history of sixteenth-century plainchant reform and Reformation history more generally.

Merbecke's corpus of edited and newly composed plainsong includes chants for Matins, Evensong, the Mass, and the Burial of the Dead, including a *Te Deum* and *Benedictus*, *Benedicite*, two settings each of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, a full Mass Ordinary including fifteen offertories and sixteen communions, and four responses for the Burial of the Dead. But as Kim's study makes clear, this small body of both edited and newly composed plainchant was a significant contribution to plainchant reform happening across Europe, and by no means was it a simple translation of Luther's reforms into England, as Robin Leaver has suggested. According to Kim, Merbecke's reform effort embodied principles of humanist musical ideology and was groundbreaking in its use of a systemized rhythmic plainchant notation that preceded Giovanni Guidetti's lauded *Directorium Chori* of 1582 by more than thirty years.

Given the Renaissance humanist interest in classical sources (*ad fontes*) and persuasive rhetoric, it is not surprising that musical humanism was concerned with discovering ancient modes of musical language that could speak more directly to the heart and will of the hearer. The role humanism played

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[1]   See John Aplin, "The Survival of Plainsong in Anglican Music: Some Early English Te Deum Settings," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 259; and Herbert Byard, "Farewell to Merbecke?" *Musical Times* 114 (1973): 303.

in polyphonic music and emerging Baroque styles and genres has been well documented by Claude Palisca, Edward Lowinsky, and Nino Pirrotta, among others. Systematic studies in the history of humanism and plainchant reform have been lacking, however, despite the connections that Kim makes absolutely clear. One of these connections is the use of rhythm to articulate both the meaning and syntax of chant text. Given the humanist concern for rhetoric, and the conviction that well-articulated statements would be more readily absorbed by the listener, chant melody became an important vehicle for well-communicated sacred text. Glarean, in his *Dodecachordon*, for example, describes well-sung plainchant as being capable of increasing Christian virtue and even teaching good speech habits to youth.

But what was well-declaimed chant? In the late fifteenth century, music treatises began to describe the importance of observing classical Latin syllable quantity in the recitation of declaimed chant. Significant Renaissance theorists including Gaffurius, Zarlino, and Glarean all wrote on the matter, urging that long vowels be represented with longer note values and shorter vowels with short note values. Easier said than done. Quantitative stress (syllable duration) could be at odds with qualitative stress (syllable accent), which created numerous potential pitfalls for a chant reformer. As a result, various treatises addressed the matter, such as Biagio Rosetti's 1529 *Libellus de rudimentis musices*, which includes models for "bene" and "male" (or even worse, "abusive") ways of reflecting prosody in chant. In his *De pronunciation*, the noted humanist Erasmus described the confusion that often resulted when choirs attempted to introduce long and short vowel lengths into chant. Despite the potential for confusion, however, assigning rhythmic values to chant had an established pedigree in Renaissance musical thought.

Modal ethos was a second preoccupation of theorists, but to date this has received little attention from scholars of early modern chant. Instead, modal chant reforms are typically viewed as an early modern corrective of medieval chant's modal vagaries. Kim suggests, however, that modal characteristics, as documented by Gaffurius and Glarean, for example, could serve as guides in the composition or recomposition of chant melodies to better suit the mood of their texts. Although the ethos of specific modes was in fact contested throughout the Renaissance, this would not prevent a chant editor from following a specific theorist and matching appropriate mode to text to either enhance or avoid the mode's perceived "power." Erasmus in his *Adages* refers to the delicate character of Dorian (Glarean: majestic and serious; Gaffurius: constant, severe) and the harsh character of Phrygian (Glarean: mournful, lamenting; Gaffurius: incites anger and war).

Inspired by humanist principles, chant reform could ensure not only effective delivery of text, but the ethical, educational, and spiritual force that good delivery enabled and that chant was thought to lack in its medieval form. This principle alone is paramount in understanding why chant in England and elsewhere was often altered in the early modern period. Changes were not simply a reaction to the Council of Trent or simple Reformation zeal, as is often cited. Rather, the Council of Trent, as Kim suggests, was itself informed by human-

ist principles predating the council's first meetings and indicative of a cultural force that extended through both Protestant and Catholic circles. The humanist ideal for plainchant reflected the inward turn of both the Reformation and Counter-Reformation—chant as a way of teaching and inscribing scripture on the heart of its practitioners and listeners.

These insights alone are a major contribution to early modern chant scholarship, but Kim achieves even more than this in her investigations into the cultural background of Merbecke's work. She notes a widespread interest in Hebrew chant throughout the sixteenth century (see Caspar Amman / Johannes Boeschenstein, 1511; Johann Reuchlin, 1518; Sebastian Muenster, 1524; and Johannes Vallensis, 1545) and identifies a marked similarity between the innovative chant notations of Merbecke, Guidetti, and Hebrew Pentateuch chant. Kim suggests that Hebrew chant notation provided Renaissance theorists, and perhaps even Merbecke, with models for prioritizing rhetorical (qualitative) accentuation over grammatical (quantitative) accentuation in their newly modulated melodies. Although the connections she draws are conjectural, they suggest fascinating new avenues for future scholarship.

The crux of Kim's work, of course, is not only establishing the relationship between humanism and plainchant reform, but convincing us of Merbecke's humanist pedigree. Kim devotes half of her book to tracing the influence of humanism (Erasmus in particular) in England and to situating Merbecke's significant religious writings within humanist ideologies. It is indeed difficult to dispute Erasmus's influence in England, given that copies of his biblical *Paraphrases* were mandated for use in all parish churches according to a royal injunction of 1547. And according to B. M. Wilson, many of the treatises of leading musical humanists were used as training manuals for musicians in England. Kim also situates Merbecke's numerous written works in the light of common humanist modes of discourse. For example, his *Concordance* (1550)—the first of the English Bible—shows the importance Merbecke assigned to lay piety as advocated in Erasmian humanist circles; and his commonplace book (begun in the 1530s and published in 1582) was one of many such books produced by humanists in the sixteenth century.

Unlike other recent contributions to the small but increasingly significant field of early modern plainchant reform, Kim's study offers a cultural history rather than a set of systematized melodic analyses. It is thus a useful and intriguing complement to other more chant-centred studies such as Theodore Karp's *An Introduction to the Post-Tridentine Mass Proper*, and Cecile Davy-Rigaud's work on Gabrielle Guillaume de Nivers in the age of Louis XIV. Although an ideological focus is the strength of Kim's book, it is also its weakness. Discussion of Merbecke's musical language and techniques are relegated primarily to the book's final chapter, where numerous rich ideas, from modal ethos to rhythmic accentuation and the influence of Christian Hebraism on text rhythm, end up reading like an afterthought rather than the heart of the matter, the place where Kim should finally be able to demonstrate humanist ideologies put into practice.

As a result, Kim's few analyses are less convincing than if she had allotted more space to fleshing them out. Some of her analyses even seem hasty. For example, in her discussion of the Creed, she mentions two uses of the "close" (whole note) outside of the Creed's opening and closing phrases. There are, however, three uses of the close within the body of the chant, one at the end of each of the following phrases: "I believe one Catholike and Apostolike Churche," "I loke for the resurrection of the deade," *and* "I acknowledge one baptisme for the remission of synnes." Kim's miscalculation impedes her analysis of yet another level of meaning communicated by this notation. Merbecke uses the close to delineate the main dogmas of the Creed: I believe in one God . . . one holy and apostolic Church, one baptism, the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Statements of belief in "the father almightie," "Jesu Christ" and "the holy ghoste" are not articulated with a close, demonstrating through notation—as one might expect of a humanist musical orator—the Trinitarian theology of "one God" in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Kim misses other opportunities to demonstrate Merbecke's rhetorical art and to defend him against his detractors. For example, Kim does not engage directly with critiques like that of John Aplin who, in 1979, concluded that Merbecke adapted his Sarum models (in particular the *Te Deum*) rather badly. At the same time, her positioning of Merbecke as a humanist provides the crucial tools needed to see Merbecke's work as strong oratory, not careless adaptation. Guided by her interpretive framework, a comparison of the Sarum and Merbecke *Te Deum* reveals Merbecke creating strong rhetorical emphasis at "let me never be confounded. " By setting the first three syllables of "let me never" to three repeated Gs, all found within the Sarum original, he brings a potentially emphatic statement into actual rhetorical prominence.

Example from John Aplin, "The Survival of Plainsong in Anglican Music: Some Early English Te Deum Settings," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 257.

Sarum tone

Merbecke adaptation
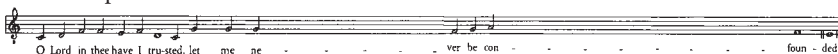
Kim's dissertation, entitled "Renaissance Humanism and John Merbecke's *The Booke of Common Praier Noted (1550),*" was completed in 2005, and this book bears the signs of an adapted dissertation. Given the spirit of her subject matter—the importance of eloquence and persuasion in communication—her prose could be clearer and more refined. It would also be helpful if important debates took place in the body of the text and not just in the footnotes—when, for example, she disputes Wilson's theory that Glarean was not read in English Protestant humanist circles. This matter has significant bearing on her work,

and it would strengthen her argument to dispute the issue at greater length in the body of her text. Given the significance of her findings, however, all this can be overlooked in favour of speedier dissemination of her research to a wide readership. In the fledgling field of early modern chant studies, every new study is eagerly awaited and indeed needed to spark ideas and suggest new directions for scholarship.

Kim identifies Merbecke in her book title as "orator." A Renaissance term used before *humanista* became current, *orator* implied a man of wisdom in whom the arts of rhetoric achieved their highest and deepest expression. Merbecke self-identified as an orator in the prefaces to his books and, according to Kim, he merits the designation, given the skill with which he transformed a Catholic, Sarum plainchant tradition into a Protestant, humanist expression of faith. Her arguments are convincing and, indeed, invaluable to studies of English music, Reformation history, and early modern plainchant reform. It is indeed the case, as Robin Leaver himself states in the foreword, that "this is an important book that deserves to be widely read and studied" (xviii).

<div align="right">Barbara Swanson</div>

Lloyd Whitesell. 2008. *The Music of Joni Mitchell*. New York: Oxford University Press. 276 pp. ISBN 978-0-10-530799-3.

In the field of popular music, recent books on Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, Metallica, and Madonna have begun to construct a framework for the scholarly study of individual artists and bands. Lloyd Whitesell's *The Music of Joni Mitchell* joins this growing group of monographs that closely analyze limited repertoires to explore the function of the artist and to understand how individual songs create musical meaning. Aside from serving as excellent case studies of larger issues, by implication such projects claim that the output of the musician(s) in question is worth studying in itself.

In the case of Madonna, for example, it has been argued that she uses her position to mount a cultural critique of gender, at the same time maintaining power over her music, her image, and her career. However, much of what scholars find remarkable about Madonna appears earlier in the career of Joni Mitchell. Though Whitesell does not intend for his project to be a feminist one (and he quotes Mitchell's own objections to the label), his book nonetheless champions the work of an artist with exceptional control over her career and her music. Like other singer-songwriters, Mitchell sang songs she penned, accompanying herself. But in times when few artists—male or female—produced and arranged their recordings or painted their own album cover art, Mitchell enjoyed a great deal of creative authority.

From the outset, Whitesell states that his work is not about the larger "significance" of Mitchell in popular music or her relationship to culture. Instead, he looks at Mitchell as a songwriter and analyzes her songs in terms of