



Postscript to Philippe de Vitry's "Ars Nova"

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Source: *Musica Disciplina*, 1960, Vol. 14 (1960), pp. 29-31

Published by: American Institute of Musicology Verlag Corpusmusicae, GmbH

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## A POSTSCRIPT TO PHILIPPE DE VITRY'S *ARS NOVA*

GILBERT REANEY

The teaching of Philippe de Vitry, important as it is for the history of music in the 14th century, is not easily circumscribed since the preserved versions of his treatise *Ars nova* are all different. Moreover, they tend to be abbreviated or to some extent corrupt. The Vatican source, which is best known owing to its publication by Coussemaker, omits the *Ars vetus*, also by Vitry, which appears in an abbreviated form in the Paris ms, Bibl. Nat., fonds latin 7378A. Nevertheless, although the latter is probably our earliest source, the musical examples are missing and both the *Ars vetus* and *Ars nova* have been cut down. Editions of the Paris and the Vatican source were published in *Musica Disciplina X* (1956), pp. 38-53 and 13-31 respectively. The Paris codex is the only preserved 14th century source, though the Vatican ms dates from c. 1400 and closely follows the version found in an early 15th century Paris ms, Bibl. Nat., fonds latin 14741. The publication of another recently identified copy of the *Ars nova* in *Musica Disciplina XII* (1958), 61-66 reveals once again another arrangement of the basic material. The anonymity of the treatise in this codex, London, British Museum, Addition 21455, and its unusual appearance accounted for the fact that it remained unrecognized for so long.

All these factors show that the theoretical work of Vitry must have been imparted mainly by word of mouth, for it is exceptional to find a treatise in such widely differing forms. After all this, it was hardly surprising to find a still more abbreviated compendium of Vitry's teaching in a late 15th century source, Siena, Bibl. Comunale, L.V. 30. The presence of this *tractatulus* on f. 129-129v of the manuscript was pointed out to me by Professor K. von Fischer of Zürich. It is only of interest as a further testimony of the influence of Vitry as a theorist, for its extreme brevity gives it little room to say anything at all. Nevertheless, it clearly combines both the old and the new arts, as can be seen from the opening sentence. The two points treated are the distinction between *modus perfectus* and *modus imperfectus*, and the use of red notes, the latter indicated in the examples by hollow notes. Most of the references can be traced in the other known versions of Vitry's treatise. The definition of the *longa* is more or less identical to that at the beginning of the London version (*Musica Disciplina XII*, 61) and that in the Paris codex lat. 7378A (*Musica Disciplina X*, 40, lines 15-19). The reference to the Trinity occurs in the London ms (*Musica*

*Disciplina* XII, 62), and the use of the rests to distinguish between perfect and imperfect *modus* is discussed in the Vatican codex (*Musica Disciplina* X, 26). Red notes, an important factor in Vitry's theory, are not mentioned at all in the London ms. In the Siena codex there is simply a general statement that red longs, breves or semibreves change the mode, time or prolation from perfect to imperfect. The qualification about the presence of the next higher note-value (*nisi cum aliqua longa forsitan ordinentur*) seems to be a corruption of the rule that a red note will prevent alteration. In this case, the motet *In arboris* exemplifies the general rule while *In nova fert animus* refers to the exception. This can be confirmed by a glance at the Vatican and Paris sources (*Musica Disciplina* X, 28 and 52).

A full description of the Siena manuscript is given by Dr J. Smits van Waesberghe in *Expositiones in Micrologum Guidonis Aretini*, Amsterdam 1957, 65f, though this source is evidently late 15th rather than 14th century. Indicative of the date is the counterpoint treatise which ends the manuscript, for this work is probably by John Hothby (d. 1487). It occurs in at least two more Italian manuscripts: London, British Museum, Egerton 2954 and Florence, Bibl. Laur., Ashburnham 1119. Particularly striking however is the discovery that the treatise of Lambertus turns up again in the Siena codex some 200 years after it was written.

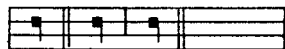
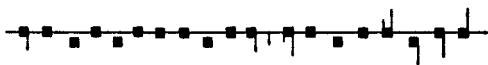
In the following edition of the compendium, additions are indicated by square brackets, omissions by round ones in the usual manner. In addition, the Latin *Philippus* has been substituted for *Philippo* in the title.

*Sub brevissimo compendio Philippus de Vitriaco  
in musica incipit.*

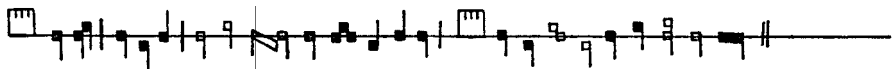
Omni desideranti notitiam artis musicae mensurabilis tam novae quam veteris obtinere, certas regulas hic presentes sub brevi compendio proponere non postpono fideliter assignare. Et quia voces seu notulas proportionabiliter oportet in hoc opere mensurare prout longae vel breves et semibreves ac minimae figurantur, idcirco ad figurationem et valorem ipsarum breviter procedamus.

Longa ergo sub forma quadrata figurata est habens tractum a parte dextra ascendentem vel descendentem, vel duos quorum dexter(a) excedit sinistrum; et tunc talis nota dicitur plica longa et valet tria tempora in modo perfecto, duo autem in imperfecto. Modus imperfectus est breves vel tempora per numerum binarium computare, et dicitur imperfectus eo quod numerus binarius est imperfectus. Numerus vero ternarius est perfectus assumptus a trinitate, scilicet a patre et filio et spiritu sancto ubi est summa perfectio. Modus perfectus cognoscitur per pausas quando pausae in longas sunt perfectae vel quando de longa usque ad aliam longam per numerum

ternarium melius quam binarium tempora computantur ut hic patet:



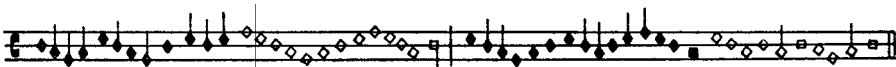
Item nota: modus, tempus et prolatio per rubeas distinguntur figuras. Inde quodcumque longa invenitur rubea, ponitur ad differentiam modi. Itaque si nigrae fuerint de modo perfecto, rubeae sunt de modo imperfecto et e converso, ut hic patet:



Breves ponuntur rubeae ad differentiam temporis. Itaque si nigrae breves fuerint de tempore perfecto, rubeae sunt de imperfecto et e converso, nisi cum aliqua longa forsitan ordine[n]tur, sicut in mottetti tenore qui dicitur *In arboris*, vel in tenore de *In nova fert animus* ut hic: (Ex. 3). Semibreves



rubeae ponuntur ad differentiam prolationis, ut si nigrae semibreves fuerint de maiori prolatione, rubeae sunt de minori et e converso, nisi semibreves cum aliqua brevi forsitan ordine[n]tur (quia tunc ponuntur ad differentiam prolationis), ut hic patet:



Hos versus discite qui cantum discere cupis:

Ante namque longa[m], tria tempora longa meretur.

Si brevis addatur, duo tempora longa tenetur.

Inter perfectas, si brevis bina locetur,  
temporis unius sit prima, secunda dupletur.

Explicit Philippus de Vitriaco.