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The (Only) Palestrina Requiem Edited by Riccardo Pintus

ABSTRACT This review examines the new edition of what is Palestrina's only authentic Requiem Mass, together with the Responsoy sung with it as part of the liturgy in Rome's Cappella Giulia. The edition includes a large-scale study of both Palestrina's compositional technique as well as a detailed study of the other Roman Requiem repertory that he could have known.

KEYWORDS Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Requiem Mass, Renaissance funeral liturgy, contrapuntal technique, chant traditions

ABSTRAKT (Jedyne) *Requiem* Palestriny wydane przez Riccarda Pintusa. Niemiejsza recenzja omawia nowe wydanie jedynej autentycznej mszy żałobnej Giovanniego Pierluigiego da Palestrina, łącznie z responsorium śpiewanym wraz z nią jako część liturgii w rzymskiej Cappella Giulia. Wydanie to obejmuje obszerne studium techniki kompozytorskiej Palestriny oraz szczegółową analizę rzymskiego repertuaru Requiem, który kompozytor mógł znać.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Requiem, renesansowa liturgia pogrzebowa, technika kontrapunktyczna, tradycje chorałowe

In the Palestrina commemorative year, Riccardo Pintus has done us a great service by providing not only a critical text and detailed analysis of what he has shown to be the composer's only authentic Requiem Mass, but also a comparative study of its Roman context of Requiems and of other settings that Palestrina could have known or performed.¹ In some ways this is far more than what the title promises. With regard to the three Requiems that have variously circulated under Palestrina's name, Pintus' earlier article (2021) had shown that the one preserved in a Cappella Giulia manuscript of 1588 and in a Gardano print of 1591 – the latter serving as the basis for this edition – must be the only authentic piece.² Liturgically, it seems puzzling, since it includes only the Kyrie, Offertory, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, and is accompanied by the responsory *Libera me, Domine*. Yet Noel O'Regan's classic 1999 article on performance practice in the seventeenth-century Cappella Giulia had revealed that, in the Seicento at least, these were the only items performed polyphonically by the Giulia, and Pintus has wisely extended the practice backwards.³

The volume has been produced with extreme care by the Fondazione Levi, and Pintus' opening essays echo this with their precision and scope. Pintus begins with an overview of Roman liturgical funeral orders, both the better-known ones for the Cappella Sistina and those for the Giulia from 1600. He then passes to 'stylistic aspects' of the piece, both in terms of sectionalization in earlier (Brumel, Morales) and contemporary (Kerle, Guerrero) Requiems. After an explanation of the various models that have been brought to bear on pitch organization, he then discusses the modally different structures of the various movements (e.g. in the current piece, the Kyrie in Mode 6 on F, but Mode 1 for the Sanctus and Mode 8 for the Agnus Dei; whether this is reflective of different moments of creation is not clear). A carefully numbered use of the 1572 chant models for monophonic Requiem items then allows him to make quite nuanced analyses of 'paraphrase' treatment in the polyphony, advancing this line of study significantly.

Perhaps the most original and fascinating part of the study is Pintus' comparison of the piece with seven other Requiems in Roman sources or possibly of Roman origin, dating from 1516–83 (Brumel, d'Argentille, Morales, Certon, Kerle, Guerrero, Victoria). Here his work, plus the preceding contribution of Antonio Chemotti, highlights the unique aspects of this piece (e.g. lack of movements and of Gregorian intonations, with the use of freely composed materials and a kind of Cantus/Tenor

1 Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, *Missa pro defunctis e responsorio 'Libera me, Domine'*, ed. Riccardo Pintus, Venice: Edizioni Fondazione Levi, 2024, pp. 198. ISBN 9788875521028.

2 Riccardo Pintus, 'The Three Requiem Masses by Palestrina: New Light on some Doubtful Attributions', *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 13 (2021) no. 2, pp. 223–47.

3 Noel O'Regan, 'Music in the Liturgy of San Pietro in Vaticano During the Reign of Paul V (1605–1621): A Preliminary Survey of the Liturgical Diary (Part 1) of Andrea Amici', *Recercare* 11 (1999), pp. 119–51.

structure) as well as those found in other versions that the composer might have known (tenor cantus firmus, overall model structure; pp. 86–87).⁴

One remaining question is the stylistic intersection of the Requiem with other Mass settings by Palestrina, and here Pintus has chosen the somewhat earlier *Missae de beata vergine* along with the later Gonzaga Masses (and so the search for a ‘late style’ in Palestrina, if one exists, is not completely evident). He also compares the Responsory included as part of the edition with structures and proportions of other examples of the genre by the composer. This also raises the question of when our Mass might have been composed or compiled.

It is not clear which (or perhaps all) of the seven examples given here might have been known to Palestrina. In his earliest training outside Rome, he might well have encountered oral traditions for Requiem services. The repertory for San Giovanni in Laterano and S. Maria Maggiore at mid-century is not completely evident. As far as the seven other settings in various Giulia manuscripts, none actually reflects the liturgical choices detailed by O’Regan, and thus it is not evident if they were used, even in part, in San Pietro. When the local selection of items was made also is not immediately apparent, given that no one has yet tracked down a specific order of services for funeral Masses from before 1600.

Was Palestrina’s limited selection of items made in response to a decision by the basilica’s chapter to limit the length of Requiems, presumably after the copying of all the sources? This would seem to be the most logical solution to the paradox, and one indirectly suggested by Argentille’s presence together with Palestrina in the papal chapel in the 1550s. The former’s Mass has all the normal items for a Requiem, and if it was copied in 1545, during what seems to be a time of relative stability in the Giulia, one would have to presume a traditional liturgical selection for polyphonic items up to some point after mid-century, a situation that would then have been changed later in the century. Argentille’s modal choice (Mode 6) is also different from both Palestrina’s and from the standard Gregorian chant tradition. It is not clear if the Giulia would have wanted to ‘pick and choose’ the polyphonic sections, if the limited liturgical choices of Palestrina’s setting had obtained already earlier in the century.

Most of the seven other Masses analyzed in detail by Pintus manifest some kind of modal unity or association. Palestrina’s does not. If its selection was the result of choosing among pre-existing Ordinary items plus the composition of new sections, one might think that the composer would have linked modal choice more thoroughly in the resultant product. The one setting that Pintus argues to have the most musical relationship to Palestrina’s, that of Morales (p. 69), is unified except for its *Agnus Dei*.

4 See Antonio Chemotti, *Polyphonic Music “Pro Mortuis” in Italy (1550–1650): An Introduction*, Lucca 2022, pp. 40–41.

Possibly Palestrina took Morales' practice while extending it to other Ordinary items inside the setting, if he composed this Mass as a whole.

The settings by Kerle and Guerrero, although chronologically closer to Palestrina, seem to relate in their textual selection to local and/or pre-Missal reform traditions. Although they were owned by the Giulia, both in their relationship to chant and to Roman practice they seem to be of different stamp. Possibly the Giulia just bought all the prints in which they are contained without worrying about the suitability, or utility, of the Requiem, as evidently this latter was of fairly infrequent practice.

Another important part of Pintus' stylistic analysis is the section on paraphrase technique (p. 34ff.). As the bibliography shows, this is not as well-studied as one might imagine. Working from post-1560 printed chant sources, Pintus is able to differentiate the rhythmic modules that the composer used in order to come up with workable points of imitation in the Requiem. Pintus notes the close imitation of chant-derived materials in internal sections, while the openings of major sections space the entrance of the voices in longer segments. It is noteworthy that the relationship among the voices is, as Pintus puts it, 'relatively democratic', with no one voice being clearly favored. The Mass's Kyrie alternates sections written on a *cantus firmus* with those in which polyphony is distributed among the voices. Here again, the comparative study of other Requiems preserved in the Giulia's collection helps highlight Palestrina's style.

A quick check of the printed source for Palestrina's piece, the 1591 Gardano *Missarum liber primus*, reveals absolute accuracy in the musical text provided here, both for the Ordinary items and the responsory. Still, the precise occasion for which this piece might have been written is unclear. It seems clearly a Giulia work from before 1588, but the basilica's archpriest, Alessandro Farnese (the 'gran cardinale') had held the post from 1543 and would not die – relatively suddenly – until 2 March 1589. Possibly it was meant for an annual commemoration of Gregory XIII (i.e. in 1586–87), along the lines of the Seicento anniversaries of the deaths of Clement VIII, Innocent VIII, and Paul III which were accompanied by Mass polyphony (a helpful table is on Pintus' p. 18). One gets the sense that Requiem polyphony was a fairly infrequent occasion in the chapel, even if its holdings possess more than enough music to cover the need.

Perhaps the specificity of its liturgical items limited the Requiem's wider circulation outside the 1591 print and the 1596 reprint. There are no use markings in the copy of the edition (Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica), and one wonders what kind of reception the piece might have had after 1591. Still, Pintus' outstanding study and edition of this piece shows just how much there remains to be done on the composer's Mass output, especially when it is so carefully contextualized as it is here. Pintus and the Fondazione Levi are to be warmly congratulated on this impressive achievement.

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