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THE MEDIEVAL HOCKET IN PRACTICE AND THEORY

By ERNEST H. SANDERS

ONE of the many significant stylistic changes brought about by Perotinus in the emergent art of measured polyphony was his cultivation of more spacious and "measured" rhythms than the durational values prevailing in the relatively fast, running dupla of presumably Leoninian discant sections, whose tenors were laid out in irregular groups of simple *longae*. Corollaries of this change were (1) the appearance of *longae duplices*, which could now be assigned to the pitches of tenors of discant passages; (2) the greater four-squareness of phrases; (3) the recognition of silence as an intrinsic measurable component of polyphony, potentially equivalent to sound as an element of counterpoint; (4) the consequent change in the meaning of the little stroke known as *divisio* from a symbol simply denoting the end of a phrase, i. e., a brief, mensurally insignificant *suspirium*, to a measurable rest (*pausa*); (5) the emergence of the first tenor patterns (four-beat phrases) in the discant settings of cantus firmi, i. e., in discant sections of organa and in clausulas; (6) the growing tendency in such settings to construct the length of the individual phrases (now delimited by precise rests) so as to exhibit mutual numerical relationships; and (7) the awareness, particularly significant in settings for more than two voices, that the voice parts of a polyphonic complex did not need to coincide in their phrase articulation, but could be made to overlap. (See Exx. la-c.) Further refinements of this technique were the lopping-off of some of the phrases in one or more parts by means of rests (Ex. 2a) and the free addition or insertion of rests (Exx. 2b-d). The irregularity of the individual phrases or phrase elements — often no more than single notes set off by rests — exemplifies what medieval writers

Ex. 1a. Excerpt from Organum triplum *Quindenis gradibus*; I-F, fol. 28^v

pre - cel - - le - - re

Ex. 1b. Excerpt from Conductus *Dum sigillum* (Perotinus); I-F, fol. 345^v

mi - - - - - (randa)

Ex. 1c. Excerpt from Organum *Exiit sermo*; I-F, fol. 102^v

me - ne - re

Ex. 2a. Excerpt from Organum triplum *Exiit sermo*; I-F, fol. 19; D-W₂, fol. 15^v

b' a' d' c'
a b c d

(manere) (Letters indicate voice exchange.)

Ex. 2b. Excerpt from Organum triplum *Judea et Jberusalem*; I-F, fol. 47; D-W₂, fol. 6^v

(vos)

Ex. 2c. Ending of Clausula *Nostrum* No. 4; I-F No. 96 (fol. 157^v)

(Nostrum)

Ex. 2d. Excerpt from Organum triplum *Benedicamus domino* (Perotinus?); D-W₁, fol. 12 (8); I-F, fol. 42^v; D-W₂, fol. 29

(do - - - - - mino)

called imperfect modes; the dovetailing of sounds and silences produced by the staggered arrangement of rests between the voices produces the well-known “hocket” effect.¹

The earliest known definitions of the hocket² are given by three contemporary writers, i. e., Franco, Lambertus, and the so-called Saint-Emmeram Anonymous (1279). The latter presents us with the fullest and most illuminating description.

You should know therefore that hocketing is produced either by cutting off sound or without such truncation. In the latter case such passages may or may not have text. If they do, they will conform to one of the modes, such as the first, second, or third, or will observe the compatibility of one mode with another, or with several, and the alternation of groups of notes with rests will proceed subtly from here and there; sometimes one may encounter cases of truncation, but they are rare. When there is no text, the alternation of the voices is the same, but more frequent and also with more truncations. — Hockets involving truncations may be composed over a tenor laid out according to one or several of the modes, or without any tenor, i. e., fundament. If such truncations are founded on a tenor, this will be without text, except in some suitable cases in motets, e. g., in *Pouvre secors* [F-Mo 31; D-Ba 36]³ or others like it. And note that such alternation is

¹ In 1954 Dom Anselm Hughes pointed out in Vol. II of *The New Oxford History of Music* (p. 397) that his examples of early hocket passages “show how hocketing may be held to have grown naturally out of the rhythmic patterns in customary use, not out of the natural depravity of the singers, as most medieval and many modern writers would have us believe.”

² Latin: *hoquetus*, (*h*)*oketus*, (*h*)*ochetus*; Latinization of French *hoquet* (Old French: *hoquet*, *hoket*, *ocquet*, etc., related to English *hickock*, *hicket*, *hocket*, *hiccup*, and similar onomatopoeic word formations in Celtic, Breton, Dutch, etc., meaning bump, knock, shock, hitch, hiccup); attempts at etymological derivation from the Arabic (see Heinrich Husmann, “Hoquetus,” *MGG*, VI, cols. 704ff.) must be regarded as unsuccessful.

³ MSS Montpellier, Bibliothèque de Médecine H 196, and Bamberg, Staatliche Bibliothek, Lit. 115 (*olim* Ed. IV. 6). All sigla and numerations of contents are given in accordance with *RISM* B IV.

done two, three or more times in a row at the mutual will of whoever begins or through frequent breaks in the continuity of the adjoined polyphony.⁴ And there are two ways of doing this: either both voices have unisons or different pitches, or one of them has unisons and the other has various pitches. And note that such truncation of pitches is done with perfect longs and breves, which sometimes are arranged in a regular pattern and sometimes not, as will be shown below; it can also be made with unequal semibreves in proper and regular disposition or even irregular with respect to their altered arrangement, as will be demonstrated presently. — In hockets not based on a modal tenor we encounter irregular and unpatterned conformations of longs, breves, and also semibreves, either each kind grouped separately or all mixed together; thus they are seldom, if ever, reducible to any kind of equivalence fitting one of the modal species.⁵

This latter type, he points out somewhat later, occurs “in aliquibus conductis [i. e., conductus caudae, of which he gives an example] sine tenore proprio hoquetatis,”⁶ though still later he adds that some modern hockets based on a Gregorian tenor are also irregular.⁷ In the course of his description of *cantus truncatus* (polyphony with truncations) he distinguishes between perfect and imperfect *hoquetatio*; in the latter, only one of the voice parts exhibits truncations

⁴ Presumably this means that hocketing above a tenor can be improvised as an ornament as well as composed and notated.

⁵ “Scias igitur quod illa hoquetatio fit aut per resecationem vocum aut sine resecatione. Si sit sine resecatione hoc erit dupliciter, quoniam aut cum littera vel sine. Si cum littera sic erit secundum primum modum vel secundum vel tertium etc. aut secundum convenientiam unius modi cum altero vel pluribus et hoc per mutationem vocum et pausionum subtiliter hinc et inde, et quandoque potest ibi resecatio reperiri, tamen hoc est raro. Si sit sine littera eadem est vocum altrinsecatio sed sepius mutuanda ac etiam resecanda. Si sit autem per resecationem vocum hoc erit dupliciter, quoniam aut supra tenorem alicuius modi vel plurium, aut sine tenore aliquo seu etiam fundamento. Si supra tenorem sit talis resecatio ordinata, hec erit sine littera, nisi aliquando conveniat in motellis, sicut patet in *Povre secors* vel consimilibus. Et nota quod talis altrinsecatio fit bis vel ter vel pluries continue pro voluntate mutua imponentis, aut per discantus appositionem sepius intermissa[m]. Et hoc dupliciter aut per voces utrinque simplices vel compositas aut ex una parte sunt simplices et ex altera composite. Et nota quod talis vocum resecatio fit per longas rectas vel breves, quandoque regulariter ordinatas, quandoque irregulariter, sicut textus postea declarabit; aut fit etiam per semibreves inaequales recto ordine dispositas et regulariter ordinatas, aut etiam irregulariter quoad dispositionem variatam, sicut textus proxime recitabit. Si sit autem sine tenore proprio alicuius modi, tunc tam longe quam breves quam etiam semibreves irregulariter et inordinate positas reperimus, similiter et confuse, ita quod vix aut nonquam ad certum equipollentie numerum quoad modum aliquem vel maneriem reducuntur.” — Heinrich Sowa, *Ein Anonymer Glossierter Mensuraltraktat 1279* (Kassel, 1930), pp. 97-98.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

and there is therefore no interlacement of voices.⁸ He also differentiates between continuous and occasional hocketing (*aut continue aut etiam intermisse*).⁹ Hence, the term *hoquetus* must be understood to designate both a technique of counterpoint and a piece in which this technique has been applied throughout. The emphasis placed by the writer on a proper mensural fundament indicates that the origin and continuing principal locus of *hoquetus* was in *cantus-firmus* polyphony, where, except for the increasingly old-fashioned organal style, the tenor mandated precise measurement of all elements; the only exceptions are occasional hocket passages in *caudas* of *conductus*.

Obviously, this writer's "hocket without truncations" refers to the technique illustrated by Exx. 1a-c (which is closely related to the device known as voice exchange). Such phrase overlaps can indeed be found in *musica cum littera* (motets, especially "peripheral" motets and the so-called isoperiodic motets composed in England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) as well as in its historical predecessor, the *musica sine littera* (discant passages of organa dupla; organa tripla and quadrupla; clausulas). Particularly revealing is the writer's statement that generally hockets with truncations (*per resecationem*) have no text, "except in some suitable cases in motets." In such cases, which are indeed quite rare in thirteenth-century motets,¹⁰ they sometimes function as suitable rhetorical ornaments (e. g., exclamations). But primarily they occur in passages in discant style without text, or as independent untexted hocket compositions. The latter therefore constitute the earliest known instrumental (nonverbal) polyphony, i. e., music that, by definition and unlike a great many clausulas, was not intended to be equipped with poetry. Such pieces, which can, of course, also be performed vocally, are preserved in MS D-Ba (Nos. 102-108, one of which the word "viellatoris" identifies specifically as instrumental, at least in origin), in MS F-P 11411,¹¹ No. 3, and in MS F-Mo, No. 5.¹² A fourteenth-cen-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Denis Harbinson excludes the one motet specifically mentioned by the Saint-Emmeram Anonymous from his article on "The Hocket Motets in the Old Corpus of the Montpellier Motet Manuscript," *Musica Disciplina*, XXV (1971), 99-112; see his note 2.

¹¹ In view of several recent references (including *RISM B IV*¹) to the provenance of this manuscript as English, it ought to be pointed out once again that there are no compelling reasons for assigning it to England. If anything, content and date,

tury specimen is Machaut's *Hoquetus David*, in which the part above the tenor is designated "hoquetus." That many more such compositions, now lost, must have been written can be inferred from the reference in the treatise by Jacobus Leodiensis to "hoketos . . . duplices, contra duplices, triplices et quadruplices."¹³ Only one four-part (vocal) hocket is known; it is the final section of a Gloria trope composed in England in the late years of the thirteenth century.¹⁴

The use of hocket as an exclamatory or pictorially descriptive device disappears from the motet in the late thirteenth century and is in the fourteenth century found occasionally in chansons, in Italian madrigals and ballate, and in chaces and caccie. In two Florentine madrigals, for instance, hocketing has the onomatopoeic function of depicting the calling after a lovelorn eagle who has escaped his master and the happy bleating of a lamb that eluded the voracious wolf. (See Exx. 3a-b.) Melismatic endings (or sectional endings) of secular compositions also at times exhibit hocket technique in a manner first manifested in some thirteenth-century conductus caudas. A motet like *F-Mo*, 294, on the other hand, shows that the earliest device to emphasize the new strophic structure of fourteenth-century motets was the isorhythmic recurrence not only of phrase endings, but of hocket passages. Beginning in the 1320s such hockets occur in many fourteenth-century motets, causing an Italian writer of a mid-century Latin treatise to mention "uchetti" only as features of motets.¹⁵ Their function now was to serve as recurring structural ornaments, placing in relief the tectonic design generated by the tenor.

taken together, would make Spanish origin more probable. Cf. Ernest H. Sanders, "Peripheral Polyphony of the 13th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XVII (1964), 261-63 and, especially, note 16; *idem*, "Duple Rhythm and Alternate Third Mode in the 13th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XV (1962), note 27; Rudolf Flotzinger, *Der Discantus-Satz im Magnus liber und seiner Nachfolge* (Vienna, 1969), 297-300.

¹² *F-Mo*, No. 3 is a version of *D-Ba*, No. 106, while *F-Mo*, Nos. 2; 64; 128; and *E-Ma*, No. 71 are versions or concordances of *D-Ba*, No. 104.

¹³ Charles E. H. Coussemaker, *Scriptorum de Musica Medii Aevi . . .*, II (Paris, 1867), 429a.

¹⁴ Cf. Ernest H. Sanders, "Cantilena and Discant in 14th-Century England," *Musica Disciplina*, XIX (1965), 24ff.

¹⁵ Santorre Debenedetti, "Un trattatello del secolo XIV sopra la poesia musicale," *Studi Medievali*, II (1906-7), 79.

Ex. 3a. Excerpt from *L'aquila bella*, by Gherardellus de Florentia

Col pa - sto - in man la chia - mo o o o o

Col pa - sto in man la chia - mo o o o

o o [o o o] o.

o [o o o] o o] o.

(With food in hand I call it.)

Ex. 3b. Excerpt from *Lucida pecorella son*, by Donatus de Florentia

Be be be be be be be

Be be be be be be be

lan-do con di - let - to e sal - tel - la re

be lan-do con di - let - to e sal - tel - la re

(Bleating with happy hops. . .)

In general, medieval writers confine their definitions of hocket to the technique of truncation, which according to Franco is synonymous with hocket.¹⁶ Odington describes it as a species of polyphony with or without text, known as truncated music, in which "one is silent while another sings. . ."¹⁷ The comments of most

¹⁶ Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, I (1864), 134a; Simon M. Cserba, *Hieronymus de Moravia O.P.: Tractatus de Musica* (Regensburg, 1935), 257.

¹⁷ Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, I, 248b; Walter Odington, *De Speculatione Musicae* Frederick P. Hammond, ed. (Corpus Scriptorum de Musica, XIV), p. 144. (Hammond's transcriptions of Odington's musical examples require emendations, and text items 6-14 must be read in the following order: 8, 9, 12-14, 6, 7, 10, 11.) The original Latin reads as follows: "Ista truncatio fit super excogitatum tenorem vel super certum ut semper unus taceat dum alius cantat" ("this truncation [i. e., hocket] is made over an invented or a fixed tenor, so that one voice is always silent while the other sings"). Denis Harbinson cites this passage to bolster his conclusion (*op. cit.*, p. 107) that "originally and in the first instance, hocket meant a single-voice syncopation. That

later writers¹⁸ are derivative and largely recapitulate Franco and Odington, whose definition has also been adopted by modern musicology.¹⁹ Only Grocheo reports an apparent popularization of hocketing, which as a polyphonic device properly belonged to the exalted sphere of *ars musica*.

Anyone who wants to make a two-part hocket arrangement, i. e., for a first and second singer, must divide the song or tune which is to be so arranged and apportion it accordingly to each. Such strains can end with bits of appropriate addition, as long as their mensuration is not interfered with. For in this way one overlaps the other in the manner of roof tiles, and thus they will cut each other off continually.²⁰

This is a relatively simple procedure that presumably required no notation for its convivial performance. A rather sophisticated example, in which each portion is ultimately reduced to the tiniest dimensions, is furnished by the two lowest voices of a fragmentarily preserved four-part English motet, designated "De sancto Laurencio," of the early fourteenth century.²¹ (See Exx. 4a-b.) This

is, a rhythmic syncopation of an upper voice against a steadily moving rhythm marking the strong accents in the tenor." He interprets Odington's description of truncation as referring exclusively to "a process which can be applied to a single voice (only) moving over a (non-truncated) tenor" (*ibid.*). That this is not what Odington meant is apparent not only from the word "semper," but also from the phrase following the sentence quoted by Harbinson: "vel si triplex, sic: duo cantent et tertius taceat" ("in three-part polyphony, two should sing and the third should be silent"). Moreover, just a few pages earlier Odington had stated that in hocket "dum unus cantat alter tacet, et e converso" ("one is silent while the other sings and vice versa" — Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, I, 246a; Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 140). Clearly, in every instance Odington is concerned with hocket, not syncopation. The motets discussed by Harbinson were composed well before Odington wrote his treatise, by which time a tenor could indeed participate in hocketing, e. g., *F-Mo*, Nos. 250, 260, and 294, cited by Harbinson (p. 103) in that very context, as well as Ex. 4b, below.

¹⁸ E. g., Pseudo-Tunsted; see Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, IV (1876), 296.

¹⁹ The classifications and definitions given in Marius Schneider's "Der Hoquetus," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, XI (1929), 390ff., are not always properly supported by the available evidence.

²⁰ Volens autem hoquetum ex duobus, puta primo et secundo, componere debet cantum, vel cantilenam, supra quod fit hoquetus, partiri et unicuique partem distribuere. Et potest aliquantulo rectus cantus exire cum decenti additione, nisi quod eius mensuram observet. Sic enim unus iacet super alium ad modum tegularum et cooperture domus et sic continua abscisio fiet." — Ernst Rohloff, *Der Musiktraktat des Johannes de Grocheo* (Leipzig, 1943), p. 58.

²¹ A "slightly cut" version of this piece has been printed in *The History of Music in Sound*, II, 58-60. The cut contains evidence that the piece does not have "only one upper part," but rather that the second upper part was written on lost leaves originally adjacent to the two folios (of two manuscripts) preserving the extant voices.

Ex. 4a. Excerpts from GB-*ONC*, fol. 85^v; GB-*Lbm* 24198, fol. 1^v

Trop est fol ky me bay - le sa femme. en garde a - tant

(Too foolish is he who right now gives me his wife to guard. . .)

b.

trop est fou

example also shows the quasi-variational function hocketing occasionally fulfilled. Instances of such treatment can already be found in caudas of conductus of the early thirteenth century, in which hocket technique is at times applied to the melodic substance of preceding sections. (See Exx. 5a-b.) The “peripheral” motets of ca. 1300 tended to assume some of the functions and certain stylistic features of the moribund conductus, and similar, though far more elaborate variation hockets occur in some of them (e. g., F-*Mo* 311 and the English motet preserved in F-*Mo* 323-4).²²

The effect of hocketing is known from other areas than Western Europe and from other times than the Middle Ages. Hocketlike

²² For a detailed discussion of the hocket as a type of variation technique available to composers of that time, see William E. Dalglish, “The Hocket in Medieval Polyphony,” *The Musical Quarterly*, LV (1969), 344-63. The author’s brief discussion of “The Theory” contains a few untenable interpretations, which he adduces to give theoretical substantiation to the use of hocket as a variation procedure. Pseudo-Tunstede’s statement that “*quelibet truncatio fundari debet super excogitatum tenorem vel super certum cantum, sive sit vulgare vel latinum*,” can only be understood to mean that “any truncation [i. e., hocket] must be founded on an invented tenor or on an established, fixed melody [i. e., *certus cantus* = *cantus firmus*], either vernacular or Latin.” *Certum* can no more be translated as “some” than *fundari* could be associated with anything other than the medieval musical notion of the tenor as the *fundamentum*. Nor does the word *vel* permit the interpretation of *cantus* as “polyphonic work.” Motets based on secular *cantus firmi* were not uncommon in England in the first half of the fourteenth century (e. g., Ex. 4a, above). Dalglish’s translation of the cited passage from Franco’s treatise must be similarly amended. The quoted excerpt from Grocheo’s treatise (p. 363) merely describes compositional technique, not a type of “parody” procedure.

Ex. 5a. Excerpts from *Conductus Veri vitis*; D-W₁, fol. 135^v (126^v); I-F, fol. 269^vf; E-Ma, fol. 35^vf

Ex. 5a. Excerpts from *Conductus Veri vitis*; D-W₁, fol. 135^v (126^v); I-F, fol. 269^vf; E-Ma, fol. 35^vf

a. rex e - li - mi - - - - (nat)

b. rex (signat)

techniques occur in African music,²³ and silences are certainly prominent in the works of some contemporary composers, such as Webern, Feldman, Babbitt, and Cage. Yet, the conceptual matrix from which these phenomena arise is quite different from the medieval idea of silence as a contrapuntal value. In modern composers' works hocket-like effects are the result of concern with texture or color, while non-Western "hocketing" generally arises from the necessity of allocating portions of a melody or of a complex sound pattern (e. g., Bali) to more than one instrument because of limitations of range, or from the social partiality for rapid and colorful antiphonal interchange.

That particular effect of hocketing of course also delighted the medieval West, as witness the use of such terms as "merry hockets" (*hoketi lascivi*)²⁴ and the procedure described by Groceo. The latter, who often reports on the music of his time in terms of its human environment, mentions that youths' and temperamental people were particularly fond of hoquetus "propter sui mobilitatem et velocitatem."²⁵ It is this "jazzy" quality that usually caused hockets to be composed in the smallest available note values;²⁶ since by the later thirteenth century semibreves and breves had become equivalent in duration to the breves and longs of earlier times, the fifth-mode tenors of some mid-thirteenth-century hockets were evidently

²³ Rose Brandel, *The Music of Central Africa* (The Hague, 1961), p. 31f; J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "The Hocket-Technique in African Music," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, XIV (1962), 44-52.

²⁴ Robertus de Handlo; see Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, I, 388b.

²⁵ Ernst Rohloff, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²⁶ See Robertus de Handlo; Coussemaker, *op. cit.*, I, 388b, 402b.

later rewritten in the second mode, with the result that in many cases hocket passages in the upper voices, originally involving breves and longs, were now rendered as semibreves and breves.²⁷ The “jazzy” quality of hockets occasionally prompted ecclesiastical disapproval, such as that in the famous bull of Pope John XXII (1324/25), in which he accused the church musicians of his time of endless abuses, one of which was that “melodias hoquetis intersecant.” Yet, the device resisted such attempts at repression. In fact, the development during subsequent decades brought about the rather ironic situation that some of the latest compositions (from the end of the fourteenth century) to exhibit hocket technique are strictly liturgical, i. e., Mass movements (e. g., especially certain isorhythmic compositions in the Old Hall manuscript). Around 1400, however, the beginnings of a profound shift in the conception of polyphony affected the hocket. The construction of music by means of the numerical coordination of heterogeneous, hierarchically ordered durational components, in which melodic considerations are of no structural importance, gradually gave way to the notion of creating a homogeneous contrapuntal fabric from one congenial set of melodic cells. Hence, in works written in the early years of the fifteenth century, notably by composers in Italy or under Italian influence (e. g., Ciconia, Cesaris, Grenon; Dufay’s *Gloria ad modum tubae*) the hocket tradition declined by transforming itself into imitative antiphony.²⁸

Ex. 6. Excerpt (upper voices) from motet *A virtutis/Ergo beata/Benedicta/Contratenor*, by Cesaris

quo pa - - gan - tur tri - - sti - - ci - e quas
et do - - cta* e - de re - gi - a pre - ci - bus (tuis socia)

*MS: doctat

(by which our sorrows are soothed, which. . .)
(and Thou, all-knowing in the royal palace, with Thy prayers place us in your charge, who. . .)

²⁷ Cf. D-Ba, Nos. 104 and 106; Anonymus IV in Coussemaeker, *op. cit.*, I, 350a, and in Fritz Reckow, *Der Musiktraktat des Anonymus 4*, Part I (*Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, IV), p. 61; Heinrich Sowa, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

²⁸ This is a slightly expanded version of my “Hocket” article prepared for the forthcoming sixth edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music & Musicians*, whose editors were kind enough to give their permission for its appearance in this journal.