

**Review: Margaret Bent, *The Motet in the Late Middle Ages*
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MARGARET BENT'S LATEST BOOK CULMINATES more than forty years of tireless original research on the fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century motet. It is a hybrid that collects and revises previously published essays and adds almost as many new ones to complete its 32 chapters. A companion website offers downloadable state-of-art pseudo-diplomatic editions of many of the motets examined in the book, carefully laid out to allow for synoptic analysis. Commentaries to these editions appear in respective chapters. Listening examples for chapters 9 and 13 are also available from the same website. The quality of the book's presentation and copyediting is close to perfect. Bent's research is indebted to several enduring collaborations and near constant scholarly exchange with the medieval musicology community and beyond: the book's abundance of eminently useful editions and translations of motet texts, for example, could not have occurred without the enduring assistance of Latinists David Howlett and Leofranc Holford-Strevens. Bent regularly engages with the scholarship of established and emerging musicologists who are focused on similar crucial questions. She often flags the need for further research on various topics. This book will appeal to both specialist and non-specialist researchers and students of medieval music, French and Latin literature, and West European medieval culture, as well as performers and avid listeners of early music. Chapters 9 and 13 will be particularly useful in musicology and even composition classrooms, and other chapters will undoubtedly be mandatory reading in future undergraduate history surveys and graduate seminars.

Bent arranges her chapters into seven parts: I. compositional techniques; II. early fourteenth-century motets connected to Philippe de Vitry; III. Machaut motets; IV. motets on musicians (*collegium musicorum*); V. early fifteenth-century English motets; VI. the Italian motet; and VII.

motets relating to the courts of popes, Burgundy and Cyprus. Compared to other books completed over shorter timeframes, readers might sometimes find this book's prose and argumentation uneven across different chapters and parts. This is especially the case in Part IV whose concise, interlinked chapters are best read in quick succession. While essays in earlier parts often explore one motet in detail, Parts VI and VII present more synthesized accounts of whole sub-repertoires.

Various themes of Bent's previous motet scholarship are brought together for the first time in this book. Most chapters are permeated by a historical informed and revisionist analytical methodology aimed at shedding light on multifaceted text-music relations, underwritten by revised and new terms for describing compositional techniques and structures. These lead to a myriad of findings that shed light on the design of motets by composers engaged with the semantic, symbolic, and intertextual significance of their texts. The proposed de-attribution of the often cited but frustratingly incomplete theoretical description of how to compose a motet (*De modo componendi*) in Chapter 2 is picked up in subsequent chapters. Revised chronologies are offered or refined for certain motets interpolated into the famous deluxe copy of the Roman de Fauvel, selected motets of Philippe de Vitry, Guillaume Machaut and Johannes Ciconia, and an interrelated set of musicians motets. Bent shines further light on notation's role (including re-notation) in the transmission of motet repertoires, especially early fourteenth-century motets and Ciconia's motets. This thread of argument underlines and contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding the chronology of notational and stylistic developments in the music of the fourteenth century and the early decades of the following century.


Bent's methodology remains unapologetically focused 'on the notes' in a way that some might categorize as 'cerebral' (14). There is little by way of situating the motet in a broader Geertzian/socio-cultural web of significance. Note counting abounds. There are undoubtedly instances where composers delighted in exploring musical number games in response to their texts. Bent nonetheless pulls back from some of her earlier proposals about the anachronistic presence of the golden ratio but maintains that other note counts and proportions are significant. Sometimes note counts correspond convincingly to the text's content or structure. At other times, it tests a reader's patience. For example, early musician motets seem to exhibit a fascination with structures based on twelve and its square, 144, that correspond to apocalyptic references their text and/or tenor chant. Yet, the reader is asked to accept that counts of breves in some motets and of semibreves in another (360) correspond. Which note units should we count? Are these numbers a result of the mensural notation system? Is there broader evidence of their apocalyptic symbolism in the fourteenth century? (In the seventeenth century, this biblical numerical symbolism is linked explicitly with apocalyptic themes in music, for example, by Athanasius Kircher in his discussion of Romano Micheli's Angelic canon in his encyclopedic *Musurgia universalis* [Rome, 1650].)

Maintaining and applying a consistent terminology for describing a motet's musical structures presents a significant challenge for a book of this extent and genesis. Bent's clarion call for new approaches and terminology in her seminal article on the term "isorhythm" (now revised as Chapter 2) has been partly answered by others in the field, for example Lawrence Earp (periodicity), Anna Zayaruznaya (upper-voice structures) and Emily Zazulia in her masterly book, *Where Sight Meets Sound* (Oxford University Press, 2021), on mensural and proportional transformations of homographic tenors in motets and then the polyphonic mass. In relation to the reviewer's own findings, a brief suggestion in an article authored with Denis Collins (*Music Analysis*, 2019) that the lower voice canon of *O amicus/Precursoris* is possibly the earliest example of a simultaneous mensuration canon that might demand a slightly different solution than that proposed by Bent goes unnoticed in Chapter 22. In the otherwise brilliant chapter 28, there is a reluctance to accept my redating of Ciconia's *O Petre Christi discipulus* despite strong historical evidence already tendered: sustaining the 'three Peters', rather than my 'two Peters', reading of this motet's text instead hangs on the slimmest of threads, namely whether 'Christi discipulus' denotes the apostle Peter or a contemporary prelate of the same name, and whether *noster* can indeed refer to a papal *nuncio* from the newly accepted Roman obedience at Padua from 1406. A full response and further details will appear in my new book, *Ciconia's Padua*. Also disappointing to this reader is the book's use of M-numbers to refer to the catalogued motets of Machaut in Part III. In Chapter 32 the motets of the Cypriot-French manuscript are also referred to using a visually identical but no doubt different M-numbers. Not only is this potentially confusing, but it closes off the sense of argument to all but the most specialized reader who holds these catalogue numbers in their head or has a separate book containing the catalogue to hand. The convention of repeatedly referring to a motet using an abbreviated text incipit as practised elsewhere in the book is gentler on both the uninitiated and experienced reader.

Finally, there is a crucial unanswered question, despite it making its presence felt on several occasions in this book. The synthesis and intersection of techniques, forms and styles are recurrent features of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century music. A focus on a single genre, governed more by our desire to wield genre as an organizing category, is repeatedly tested by several referenced studies (7, 510, 552, 561, 566–7). In the case of the Italian motet, Trecento song offers precedents both for isorhythmic process but also techniques like canonic introductions—in this respect Lopatin's important study in *Studi Musicali*, n.s. 6 (2015) is overlooked—and melodic lyricism. The conundrum presented to us by the compiler of the Trémoille manuscript index, c. 1376 (discussed in Chapter 31) who included canonic *chaces* in a list of motets also highlights limitations of a narrow definition of the motet rather than a spectrum of Bakhtian possibilities available in the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries. Bent signals as much (though not in these terms) in a brief exploration of problems defining the motet as a single genre (1–4), but the question of genre also reveals more research needs to occur on the cross-fertilization of musical genres in this period.

Bent has not set out to provide a comprehensive account of the late medieval motet: she states her book is ‘mostly about motets of the fourteenth century, extending in some chapters into the early fifteenth’ (1). Perhaps ‘selected motets’ would be more accurate. The centurial scoping statement is more useful than the slightly troubled ‘Late Middle Ages’ in the title of the book. The increased recognition of a long fourteenth century, c. 1315–c. 1430, in European music history might have also informed this book’s scope and title. Bent’s focus is resolutely on motets from Western Europe, especially those connected to England, France, and Italy in the broad sense. Much remains to be done on Central European Latin-texted repertoires, including relations between Latin contrafacted songs and the early fifteenth-century cantilena motet in central European sources, and their relation to Western European trends. Central European connections to the Italian motet and related forms also offer further opportunities for future research. Future research on the motet might aim a) to strip away nationalistic terms and concepts—the tension of terms ‘French’ and ‘Italian’ is palpable in Bent’s book, even if authors of the time used similar but not equivalent terms to refer to themselves or others—; b) to adopt new historiographic approaches that recognise that (Western) Europe and its cultures were shaped just as much by internal factors as they were by relations with surrounding regions; and c) to further refine chronologies and to question periodizations of stylistic developments in this same timeframe. The seminal historiographic work of Reinhard Strohm has already opened up new vistas in this respect, and the research of a new generation of scholars, including David Catalunya, Paweł Gancarczyk and Mark Lewon (among others), will be crucial for ‘decentering’ medieval musicology in the coming decades. One wonders what complexion the motet, especially with its fascination with Greco-Roman antiquity and Judeo-Christian religion, might take on from approaches borrowed from global music history or even ‘global renaissance’ scholarship. For this and other future research on the motet and music of the long fourteenth century, Bent’s book will remain a foundational text and indispensable starting point for many decades to come.

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