

TWO MAGNIFICAT SETTINGS BY FRANCESCO SORIANO

LUÍS HENRIQUES

Francesco Soriano is one of the cases where composers of the same generation become lesser known than the popular composers of the time, and the last decades of the sixteenth century were a great time to be forgotten from the mainstream Music History books. It was the case in Italy during Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's or in Spain during Victoria's time. Soriano was born near Viterbo in 1548 or 1549 and died in Rome on 29 July 1621. He studied with Palestrina during his early years as a choirboy of the *cappella* in St John Lateran, being ordained to the priesthood in the 1570s. In 1580 he was appointed *maestro di cappella* of the Roman church of S. Luigi dei Francesi and, in the following year, he took a position at the Gonzaga court in Mantua but returned to Rome in 1586 where he spent the rest of his life as choirmaster of three churches, including the Cappella Giulia in St Peter's, retiring from these duties in 1620.

Soriano is mostly known as the master who continued, together with Felice Anerio, the revision of the Roman Gradual after Palestrina's death in accordance with the Council of Trent deliberations. This was to become the so-called *Editio Medicaea*. As a former pupil of Palestrina, it is natural that Soriano's musical style would develop in the shadow of the great Roman master, therefore his music is mostly oriented in the immediately post-

tridentine style combined with the new textures both of homophony and polychorality. He is known for his arrangement for four voices of Palestrina's six-voice *Missa Papae Marcelli*.

As part of his duties as *maestro di cappella* he would have to write music for the liturgical routines of the institutions he served. Most of his works survive therefore in manuscript choirbooks. Among his few printed works one finds a collection of music published in 1619 titled *Passio D. N. Iesu Christi secundum quatuor Euangelistas. Magnificat Sexdecim. Sequentia fidelium Defunctorum, una cum responsorio*. This long title identifies the content of the book, which comprises music for the most important liturgical ceremonies of the year, notably the Holy Week. Among these works are eight settings of the *Magnificat* each in one of the eight tones.



Francesco Soriano, *Magnificat Primi Toni*

The *Magnificat Primi Toni* has polyphony provided for the odd verses of the Marian canticle in a four-voice texture. One of the first things that one can identify in both settings is that the verses are very short with almost no word repetition. It basically follows the models of Magnificat composition of the time with a strong homophonically-influenced way of delivering the text musically. It maintains a four-voice texture throughout the piece, with some voice reduction to three voices in the first hemistich of the verse “*Deposit potentes*” immediately returning to four voices in the second. He expands the rhythmic values in “*Suscepit Israel*” to *semibreves*, contrasting with the previous *minima*-based verses. The doxology “*Gloria Patri*” is set in triple time, again in longer note values.

The *Magnificat Secundi Toni* has also polyphony set for the odd verses of the canticle. One of the first things one can hear throughout the work is a scale motive of six *seminimas* (three ascending, three descending) that is repeated in every verse, sometimes changing in the orientation or shortened to four figures. Mostly due to this ornamental motive, the first verses are not so homophonically orientated as the last verses, with more movement in the voices. Homophony begins to appear in the verse “Deposuit potentes”, a very short syllabic verse being reduced to the basic text delivering. Although the ornamental motive makes two appearances in its four-note configuration in the verse “Suscepit Israel” this is a predominantly homophonic verse. Soriano begins the doxology “Gloria Patri et” in triple time, surprisingly changing the remaining of the verse to doble time.



Francesco Soriano, *Magnificat Secundi Toni*

The *Magnificat* setting of Francesco Soriano have been an interesting rediscovery to me. They are brief works but, in general, with movement in the voices which suggest some post-tridentine Palestrinian clarity in the musical delivering of the text with almost no repetitions, although this is characteristic we can hear in almost all *falsobordone* Magnificats which are strongly homophonically-orientated. I hope to write soon about another couple of Magnificats by Soriano.

Henriques, Luís. “Two Magnificat Settings by Francesco Soriano”, *Cantum Mensurable*, 19 November 2020, <https://luiscfhenriques.hcommons.org/two-magnificat-settings-soriano/>