Hodie Christus Natus Est

Editorial Notes

Hodie Christus natus est by Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck appears as the thirteenth of twenty-six motets which comprise the print ***Cantiones sacrae***, which is first published by Pierre Phalese of Antwerp in 1619. Without doubt, *Hodie* is the most well-known motet from this print, if not the most well-known of Sweelinck's works. It has maintained popularity in the choral repertory despite some very thorny problems not addressed in previous editions of the work. This edition proposes solutions to these problems, based on a scholarly understanding of the intentions expressed in Sweelinck's original notation.

Mensuratio and Rhythm

Of the fifty-one seperate *partes* which comprise the *Cantiones sacrae*, twenty-seven are presented under the sign 𝔠 (*tactus alla breve*), the remaining twenty-four under the sign 𝐂 (*tactus alla semibreve*). The general orthography of the notation suggests that the two signs are used to convey different musical styles, as Michael Praetorius suggests in *Syntagma musicum III:*

> At the present time, these two signatures are usually distinguished in such a way that 𝐂 is mostly used in madrigals, the 𝔠 in motets. Madrigals and other compositions, which have the signature 𝐂 and an abundance of semiminims and fusae, move along at a faster pace; motets, however, with the signature 𝔠 and a prevalence of breves and semibreves at a slower pace. Therefore, in the latter case, a faster beat, in the former a slower beat, is necessary in order to achieve a mean between the extremes, otherwise the slower speed will annoy the listener's ears and the faster speed (will) lead to disaster...[1]

Hodie is one of the pieces which evince the more modern style of notation, featuring many shorter (black) notes. It is unique in that it has two mensural signs— 𝐂 and 3/2. The sign 𝐂 indicates that the tactus is at the semibreve (◇), each stroke represented by a minim (quarter note in transcription). The fractional sign 3/2 indicates *proportio sesquialtera,* which indicates that three minims in 3/2 are equal in duration of two minims under the sign $\mathbf{C}^2$. Even armed with this information, the conductor is presented with two problems: 1) unlike all the other motets in this print (and the vast majority of pieces generally), *Hodie* begins with triple meter, not duple (in spite of the fact that Sweelinck clearly lists 𝐂 first!), and 2) previous editions have not clarified which note value represents the original tactus. I have transcribed the minim as a quarter note, hence sections in 𝐂 are transcribed in 2/4. Accordingly, sections in 3/2 are transcribed in ¾, the three quarters equal in duration to (a triplet of) the two quarters in 𝐂. Previous editions have used 6/4 (which represents **two** measures, not one) and 𝐂 (which implies 4/4, or two measures of the tactus). Since the piece starts (atypically) with triple mensuration, it is difficult to set a tempo which captures the jubilant mood of the word "Hodie" and yet works equally well for the predominantly duple meter. The proper relationship is measure = measure, i.e. three quarters = two quarters. If one sets a tempo which suits the affect of the opening 'hodie" (e.g. measure equals M.M. 72), the tempo may initially work, but becomes ludicrously fast in the duple section [M.M. 72 → quarter in ¾ = 216; quarter in 2/4 = 144] I recommend M.M. 52 as a workable pulse, the quarter note equalling 156 in ¾ and 104 in 2/4. This readjustment of the metric notation also solves the troublesome spot at the conclusion of the

text "laetantur Archangeli"(m. 83 in the current edition). In previous editions (using 6/4 and 4/4), the return of the duple meter at "Noe, Noe!" occurred in the middle of a "measure," causing great confusion about what equaled what. With the "smaller" unit measures, this problem no longer exists; not only the proportion, but also the tempo and quality of beat are now clearer.The only negative aspect of this realization is that, like the transcriptions of Willi Apel and Arthur Mendel, the music doesn't much resemble the notation of Renaissance music. However, that seems a small price to pay for the resulting clarity. Though tempting, there is nothing in Renaissance mensural practice which condones quarter note equivalence across a metrical change (i.e., a quarter note in ¾ is not equal).

Like most all his predecessors, Sweelinck likes to create rhythmic groupings in individual vocal lines which contradict the prevailing mensuration. Thus, in the triple meter section, we find *hemiolae* (m. 74 ff.) and in the duple, frequent groupings of three (indicated by 3¬ above the affected notes).

Pitch

The originally notated pitch of Sweelinck's motet indicates Hypoionian mode on **C**. The ranges of the voices are paired conterminously, Soprano and Tenor having the plagal octave (g–g) and the Alto/Bass the authentic (c–c). Because of these high ranges, *chiavette* (high clefs) are employed to accommodate the music on the five-line staff. Of course, for Sweelinck the written pitch "c" did not necessarily connote "c" in an A=440 sense. Indeed, some scholars believe that the presence of high clefs automatically indicates downward transposition by as much as fourth.[3] For modern choirs, downward transposition seems prudent, and I have suggested performing the piece in A (or A-flat or B-flat). Of course, transposition does not solve range problems, but merely transposes them somewhere else. In the suggested key, the alto part is, in places, too low for female altos. In this edition there are several places where it may prove valuable to switch the alto and tenor lines for a brief period to remedy this problem; these are marked in the edition with an asterisk (*). Perhaps the better solution is one first proposed by Robert Shaw, viz. mixing alto and tenors on both vocal lines.

General Notes

As is typical in most contemporary editions of Renaissance early 17th century music, the note values of the original have been halved (e.g. minim = quarter note). Likewise, all dynamic, expressive and tempo marks are editorial and intended only as suggestions. All of the accidentals which appear in the score are Sweelinck's (and evince a transitional phase between modality and tonality). The editor believes that the proportional shifts will be made more easily if no ritard is taken in the measure(s) preceding them. As a general rule of thumb, individual lines may be shaped dynamically by observing the contour of the line and the relative importance of the material being sung vis-a-vis the other parts of the texture. Finally, the accent (or lack thereof) of the text often indicates the proper articulation of the line.

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[1]Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum III* (1619), translated by Hans Lampl. Unpublished DMA dissertation (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1957), p. 104.

[2]The Latin word *sesquialtera* ("one and one half") expressed fractionally is 3/2.

[3]Cf Andrew Parrot, "Transposition in Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610: An 'aberration' defended. *Early Music*, (November, 1984), pp. 490-516. Contrarily see Jeffrey Kurtzman's reply in the same journal, February, 1995.

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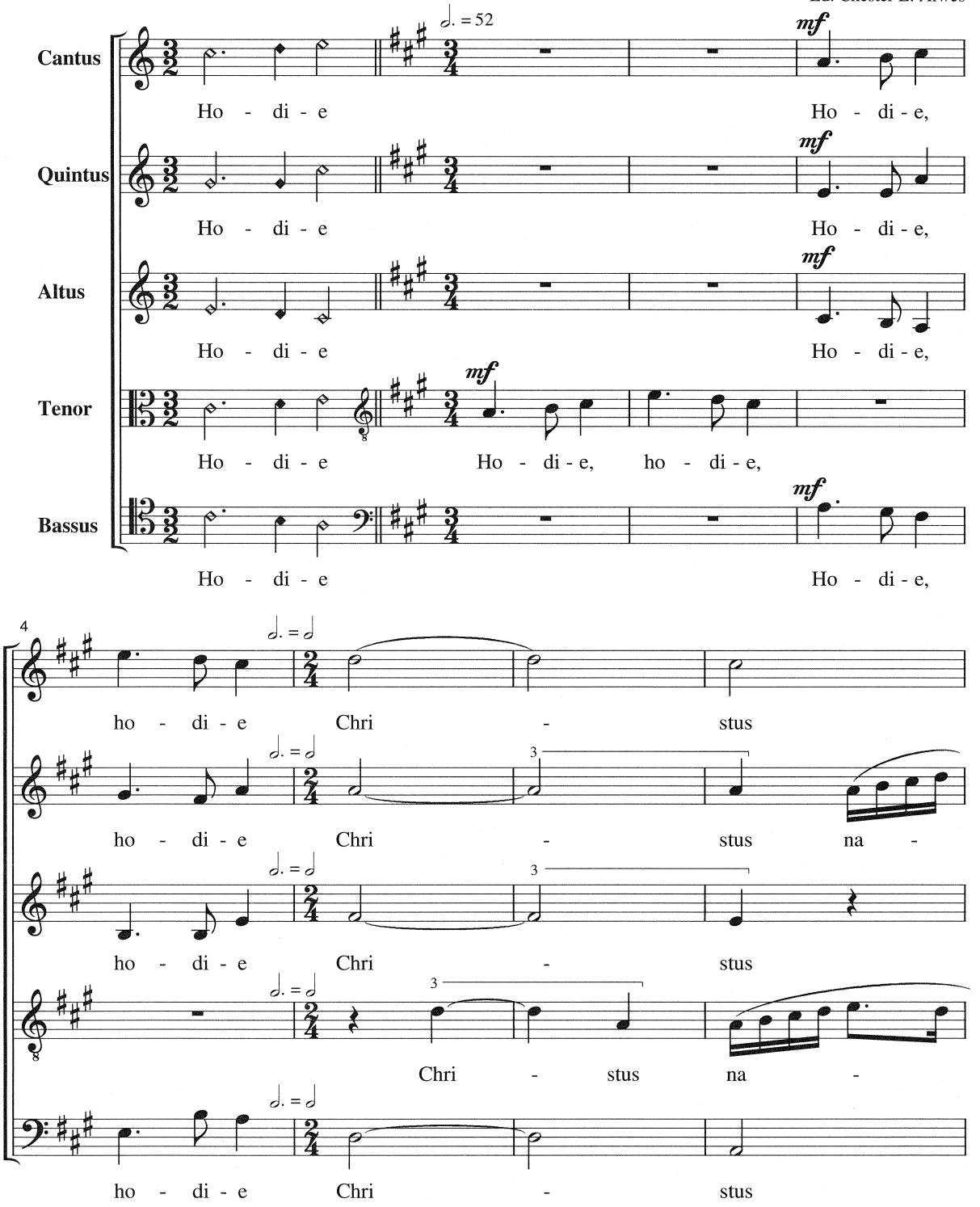
From *Cantiones Sacrae*
SSATB, *a cappella*

Traditional

J. P. Sweelinck (1562-1621)
Ed. Chester L. Alwes



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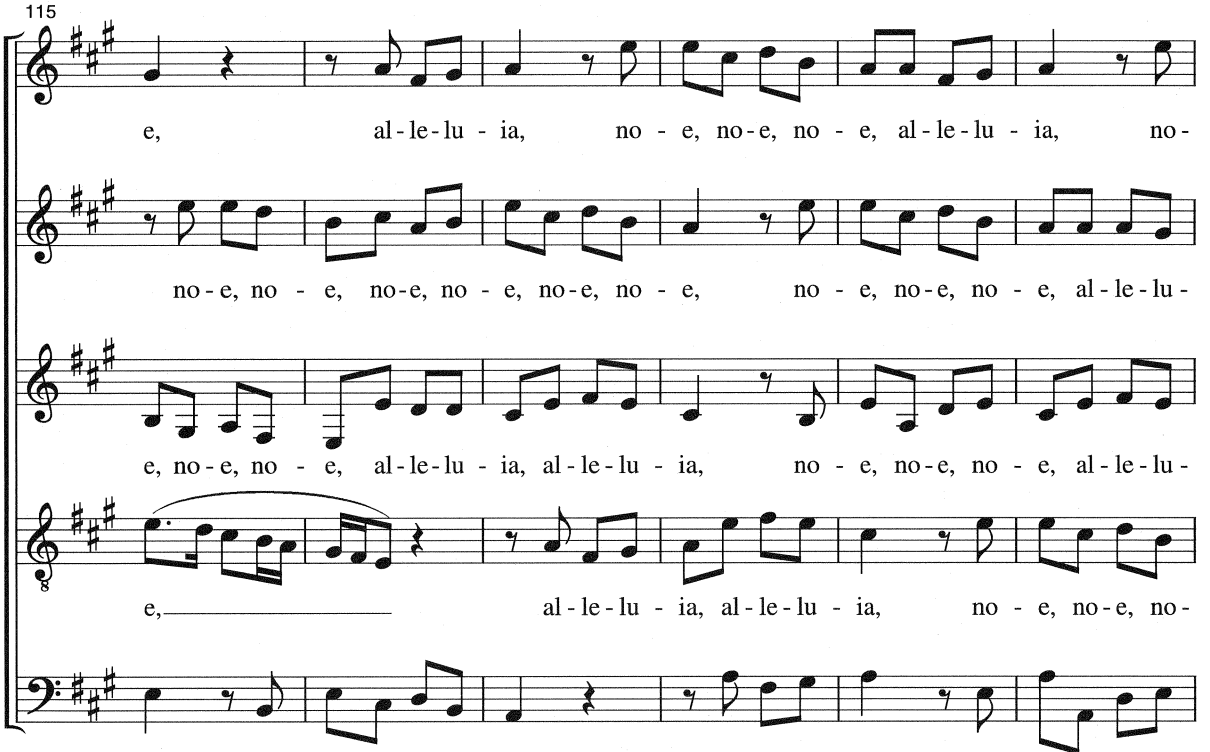
115
e, al-le-lu-ia, no-e, no-e, no-e, al-le-lu-ia, no-
no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, al-le-lu-
e, no-e, no-e, al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia, no-e, no-e, no-e, al-le-lu-
e, al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia, no-e, no-e, no-
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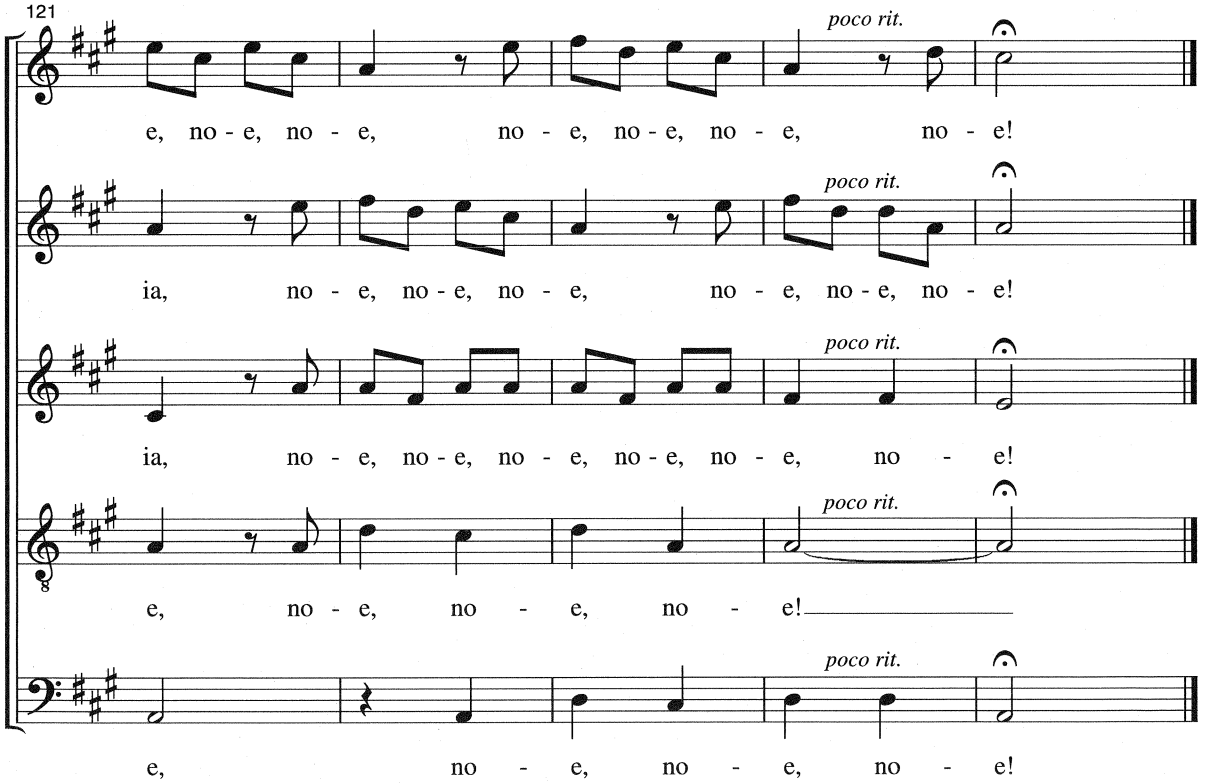
121
poco rit.
e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e!
poco rit.
ia, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e!
poco rit.
ia, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e, no-e!
poco rit.
e, no-e, no-e, no-e!
poco rit.
e, no-e, no-e, no-e!