

Philippe de Monte

from 1521 to 2021

In 2021, we will mark the five hundredth birthday of Philippe de Monte (1521–1603), who spent the last two decades of his life in Prague as *maestro di capella* to the emperor Rudolf II. Despite the fact that he was one of the most prolific composers of his time, he remains to this day considerably overshadowed by his contemporaries Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525/26–1594) and Orlande de Lassus (1532–1594), with many of his works unavailable in modern editions or recordings. In the following text, Jan Bata, a musicologist at Institute of Musicology at Charles University introduces the Flemish composer, as well as the current state of research and the possible futures of an online complete editions project.

The Past

The composer was a native of Mechelen, the centre of the County of Hainaut (a region now split between France and Belgium), where he was born in 1521. There is no further information about the composer's birth or the first years of his life. It is assumed that he gained his introductory musical education in his home city, at the cathedral of St. Rumbold. Monte then left for Italy, where we have evidence of his activities from the end of the 1540s until the mid 1550s, specifically in Naples and Rome. He then returned to his home country, only to depart again, this time for England. He spent the years 1554 and 1555 there in the music chapel of the Spanish king Philip II of Spain, or rather in the services of his wife, Mary I of England (Mary Tudor). He maintained the friendships he established during his engagement through correspondence, often including considerably younger composers.

After his departure from England in 1555, Monte attempted to secure the post of chapelmaster of Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria, but he did not

succeed. The post was taken up by Orlande de Lassus a year later, whom Monte subsequently met personally and maintained correspondence with. Monte then headed to Italy again, where he spent several years supported by various patrons. His traces lead through Genoa, Florence, and Rome. When Jacobus Vact, Kapellmeister to Maximilian II, Holy Roman Emperor, died at the beginning of the year 1567, the emperor and his emissaries began searching for a successor. Even Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina himself was being considered, but in the end, Philippe de Monte was chosen and named the court chapelmaster in 1568. At that point, he could hardly have suspected that he had set himself up for a long thirty-five years of service to two Habsburg emperors.

Monte was not only highly valued for his personal and artistic qualities by his musical colleagues – his art was appreciated by the imperial court, too: in 1572, Maximilian named him the guardian of the treasure of Cambrai, and five years later, he was awarded a canonry by Rudolf II (canonries were a device through which emperors frequently



Raphael Sadeler Sr. (1560–1632): Philippe de Monte (1594)

supported deserving musicians who were also clerics). Monte, however, never made use of this prebend, as his numerous requests for retirement were repeatedly declined by the emperor. Philippe de Monte died on July 4th 1603 in Prague, and was buried in the Basilica of St. James in the Old Town of Prague, as specified in his will.

The composer spent almost half of his life directing the imperial music chapel. What did this ensemble look like? The origin of the German word *Kapelle* (band or ensemble; *kapela* in Czech) is related to the word *Kapell*; chapel (*kaple* in Czech), a sacred space in which church services were officiated in the presence of the ruler. Providing musical accompaniment to such rites was among the primary functions of the court ensemble. The ensemble – also known as a *Capellnparthey* in this period – had a fixed position in the hierarchy of the court. It was mostly composed of men – adult and boy singers, chamber musicians, an organist, and other persons occupying positions related to music in the imperial chapel (the almoner; chaplains; the teacher to the boy choristers; copyists; a tuner). There was also another musical ensemble – the trumpeters and drummers, who were not, however, fully part of the chapel. Instead, they were grouped with the equerry (*Stallparthey*; the officers in charge of the stables), which had to do

with their originally military and later representative function. Many phenomenal musicians of European stature passed through the imperial chapel during Rudolf's reign – at its height, the group consisted of around sixty musicians.

All this suggests that the imperial chapel mostly performed sacred music. With some degree of hyperbole, we can thus state that Philippe de Monte composed much of his sacred music with a view to the abilities and assets of this group. His preferred genres of sacred music included motets (250 pieces), spiritual madrigals (131 pieces), and masses (37 in total). Monte's secular output, however, was much greater, particularly in the field of the Italian madrigal. This too could, of course, be useful at the court: at various festivities and ceremonies, as well as in the emperor's private chambers. But Maximilian or Rudolf are not the only one's to whom Monte dedicated his collections of madrigals, of which there are thirty-five (!) in total. Among the list of dedicatees, we find both secular and church dignitaries, wealthy aristocrats, and experts in music who were able to appreciate the composer's art.

Some of his contemporaries described his style as *musica reservata*, a term that contains several meanings, beginning with a close relation between the music and the text and also including rhythmic and chromatic nuances (and social aspects, too: the Grove Music Online dictionary defines *musica reservata* as music “reserved for a particular section of the public, whose members regarded themselves as connoisseurs”). All this can, indeed, be found in Monte's music. But it is apparent that his highly original compositional style transformed during the course of his long artistic career, even though it was always based in the art of vocal counterpoint, a style for which composers originating from the area now known as Benelux were famous already in the 15th century. Philippe de Monte, however, had a great sensitivity for words set to music, and his contrapuntal craft was always unconditionally subordinated to the text. These artistic qualities, which all of Europe had a chance to acquaint itself with (mostly thanks to the work of prestigious printing houses in Venice and Antwerp), led to Monte being appreciated literally across all of Europe by both professionals and laymen.

If we stand in wonder when faced with the number and quality of Monte's works, we cannot but help asking ourselves: How could such a famous composer, whose oeuvre is just as extensive and significant as that of Palestrina or Lassus, fall into



Hans von Aachen (1553–1615): Rudolf II. (1606/1608)



Philippe de Monte: *Missa Confitebor tibi Domine* (manuscript, Prague, National Museum – Czech Museum of Music, sign. AŽ 33, f. 121r)

oblivion so soon after his death? There are multiple possibilities, but let us mention two here, at least. Firstly, Monte was celibate, so after his death – unlike Palestrina and Lassus –, he had no one to actively maintain his legacy. Secondly (again in contrast to the two more famous composers), he did not write a work that became the stuff of legends, like Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* or Lassus' *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* and *Psalmi poenitentiales*, which would secure him constant popularity throughout the centuries that followed. Philippe de Monte stands squarely in the shadow of Palestrina and Lassus, and outside of the interest of musicology, too. This is why his oeuvre is still not available in a modern, complete edition (both attempts in the past failed).

The Present

The five hundredth anniversary of Monte's birth is therefore a more than adequate reason not only to remind ourselves of the existence of his music, but also to initiate a new wave of academic interest in this composer and his oeuvre. It was with this ambition that the two-day international symposium, *Philippe de Monte at 500*, was organised by the Musica Rudolphina research centre along with the Prague Archbishopric, the Institute of Musicology of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, and the Association for Central European Cultural

Studies, under the auspices of His Eminence Cardinal Dominik Duka, Archbishop of Prague, with financial support from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Foundation of the Czech Music Fund. The symposium took place in the Cardinal Beran Hall at the Archbishop's Palace in Prague on the 19th and 20th of August 2021. The programme consisted of ten papers by experts from Czechia, France, Croatia, Italy, Austria, Spain, and the USA. Given the pandemic situation, some of them were presented over the internet or played back from video recordings. The contributions were divided into four sections, focusing on the composer's work, its reception, and a discussion of various sources.

The opening section (*The Composer and His Works I*) began with a presentation by the doyen of Monte studies, Robert Lindell (Vienna) and his keynote *How the Fleming Filip van de Bergh became Filippo di Monte, the most prolific composer of Italian madrigals*, in which he summarised the current state of knowledge about the composer's life and work. Ferran Escrivà-Llorca (Universidad Internacional de Valencia), in his paper *Philippe de Monte as understood by Pietro Cerone*, meticulously analysed an extensive treatise by Pietro Cerone (1566–1625), *El melopeo y maestro, tractado de música theórica y práctica; en que se pone por extenso; lo que*



Philippe de Monte: Il quarto libro de madrigali à quattro voci (1581)

uno para hazerse perfecto musico ha menester saber (1613; the treatise presents 849 chapters in a total of 1160 pages), which repeatedly cites pieces by Monte as model works. Marc Desmet (Université de Lyon – Université de Saint-Etienne) presented a brilliant analysis of Monte’s treatment of the poetic form of the sonnet – *Belga apud Gallos. Philippe de Monte and the treatment of sonnet form in the Sonetz de P. de Ronsard (1575): madrigal or chanson?*

The following block of papers (*Itinerary of Sources*) provided crucial findings about sources related to Monte in the United States. Petr Daněk’s (Academy of Performing Arts, Bratislava) contribution, *Thou shalt not steal. (Exodus 20:15). On the fate of the so-called Sabbateni Collection in New York*, convincingly proved that the Bohemical collection of vocal part books now stored at the New York University Library (Fales Library and Special Collections) originally belonged to the bishop’s library in Litoměřice (a city some 60 kilometres north-west of Prague), from where it was stolen in the 1970s. Erika Supria Honisch (Stony Brook University, New York), in a paper titled simply *Philippe de Monte in Chicago*, brought our attention to a recent acquisition by the Newberry Library in Chicago, in which the bass part of the originally six-voice set of part books of Saxon origin contains a heretofore unknown five-voice setting of the German song *Weiss ich ein Megdlin reine* by Monte.

The *Transmission of italianità* block of papers focused on the migration of repertoire between Italy and Central Europe and the reception of Monte’s works in the Mediterranean. Stanislav Tuksar (Zagreb), in his paper *Musical conditions in Split at the time of Philippe de Monte in Prague and the reign of Rudolph II (1576-1612)*

pointed out the remarkable and rich musical culture of Split, as well as the significant and as yet unexploited resources of the Franciscan monastery there, which also include a print of Monte’s motets from 1593. Daniele V. Filippi (Milan) focused his attention on reception of the spiritual madrigal in Central and Northern Europe through the works of Philippe de Monte (*Philippe de Monte and the culture of the spiritual madrigal north of the Alps*). The block concluded with an essay from Gilberto Scordari (Bari) titled *Two madrigals of Philippe de Monte in Francesco Baseo’s Primo Libro di Madrigali a cinque voci (Venice, 1573)*, in which he brought attention to contact between Monte and Baseo, contact that seems to have been a lot more direct than we had previously assumed.

The symposium concluded with a section titled *The Composer and His Works II*, which began with Kateřina Maýrová (Prague) and her overview of Monte’s compositions that survive in the Rokycany collection of part books (*The sacred works of Philippe de Monte in the Rokycany music collection*). The very end of the conference took the form of a discussion, *Towards the online critical edition of Monte’s work*, led by Jan Bata and Jan Bilwachs (Charles University, Prague), which presented the vision of a renewed collected edition of the music of Philippe de Monte. The conference also included an accompanying programme in the form of concerts of music by Philippe de Monte and his contemporaries performed by the Gontrassek vocal ensemble and organist Tomáš Flégr.

In the international musicological society, the year 2021 mostly resonated with the five hundredth anniversary of the death of Josquin Desprez (1450/55-1521), which is why *Philippe de Monte at 500* was one of the few conferences (if not the only one) to pay considerable attention to Monte. The ongoing pandemic and the uncertainty that results from it (as well as the disruption to international travel) meant that the auditorium in Cardinal Beran Hall was not as full as one could expect under normal conditions. Thanks to online connectivity, however, the event found perceptive listeners not only in Czechia, but also in Europe and overseas. Doubtless also thanks to the short video invites in Czech, English, German, and Spanish that are available – along with samples from the conference concert – on the YouTube channel of the Musica Rudolphina research centre.

The Future

Although the two-day international symposium contributed many previously unknown facts

about the works of Philippe de Monte and its reception, mediated new academic connections, and all the papers presented will be published (in completed and extended form) in the online journal *Clavibus unitis*, this composer deserves greater and more consistent attention.

We stated in the introduction that Monte remains, to this day, eclipsed by his contemporaries Palestrina and Lassus, with his works often unavailable in modern editions or recordings. But it is particularly the lack of availability of Monte's printed music in a modern, critical edition that is a pressing problem not only from a musicological perspective but also as regards performance practice. This lack is what the *Philippe de Monte Online* project, currently under development, aims to address – its ambition is to make Monte's oeuvre available in electronic form online in such a manner that it might conform to the most rigorous demands placed on an academic critical edition.

Barring the “pioneering” times of the 19th century, when the first attempts to publish modern editions of Monte's compositions took place, there were two efforts to publish his collected works in the 20th century (Charles van den Boren – Julius van Nuffel, eds. *Philippe de Monte opera*. Düsseldorf: L. Schwann, 1927–1939, 31 volumes; René Bernard Lenaerts et al., eds. *Philippe de Monte opera. A New Complete Edition*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975–1988, 13 volumes). However, neither of them was completed, with only highly respectable remnants of the editors' original intentions remaining – even so, however, this means that we have at our disposal about three thirds of the masses, most of the motets and other liturgical pieces (e.g. the *Magnificats*), and most of the sacred madrigals. On the other hand, their activities left out all the French chansons and Italian madrigals – a decision that is hard to comprehend in the case of a composer who devoted a considerable portion of his creative skills to the madrigal.

Philippe de Monte Online wants to begin where the previous collected editions stopped short. It therefore primarily attends to Philippe de Monte's secular works. The editors are planning to include the two previous editions in PDF form on the project's website, thus making it the true centre-point of modern Monte research. Preparations for the project will take place in 2022 and 2023: putting together a comprehensive list of sources, assembling a broader international editorial team, formulating working versions



Philippe de Monte: Sonetz de Pierre de Ronsard (1575)



A snapshot from the conference

of the editorial principles, and resolving the technical and legal parameters of the project. The online editions will then begin being published in 2024, at an ideal periodicity of two volumes per year.

Given the enormous scope of Monte's oeuvre, online publication seems like the only possibility today – it is considerably cheaper than a traditional print publication and has a truly global and practically immediate reach. We cannot expect this project to run without difficulties, particularly in its beginnings, but the ten years of experience acquired by the Musica Rudolphina research centre, its international acclaim, and also its personnel are all good reasons to remain optimistic. After all, we need only look to Philippe de Monte's personal motto for a model: *Rien sans peine!* (No pain, no gain!)