Anacruses and Opening Rests in the Leuven Chansonnier*

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In almost all notated polyphonic compositions in the fifteenth century, any individual voice might begin with a rest, but at least one of the voices begins with a note. The voices with rests have to count their rests from the first performed note. In order for performers to start a piece correctly, they need to have some idea of the pitch and tactus, and they need to see their own part. There is no need for them to look at the other voice parts to know when they have to start singing.

There are nevertheless a number of pieces in which *all* voices start with the same or a different number of rests. In order to begin a piece on an offbeat, composers or scribes could give all voices rests to fill out the remainder of the tempus or modus.¹ When there are opening rests in all voices, each performer has to be aware that this is the case: that they have to start counting *before* they hear the first performed note. Either one of the performers has to indicate precisely when they should start counting, or they all have to know the minimum number of opening rests. Of course, this is usually a straightforward operation: once the performers know what they have to do, there is no difficulty in producing the correct result. But the performers nevertheless need to know that something exceptional is happening. While performers usually do not need to look beyond their own voice part, in these instances performers have to look at the beginning of each part or otherwise convey this information to each other.

The potential confusion caused by the use of opening rests in all voices is not limited to performers. Just as singers might expect at least one voice to start without rests, so too might scribes, who in turn might be tempted to modify the notation of their exemplar into what they expect to see. Scribal errors provide evidence that opening rests did actually cause confusion, especially in less straightforward instances. Further examples of opening rests can provide insight into contrapuntal and metrical issues in composition. As will be seen, opening rests might be added in the middle of the compositional process for the sake of the contratenor or to correct metrical irregularities.

* My thoughts on the songs in the Leuven Chansonnier first started developing at a fruitful two-day workshop in Leuven in February 2018, addressing issues concerning the musical and textual ‘reconstruction’ of the LC unica. Thanks to David J. Burn, Fabrice Fitch, Scott Metcalfe, and the singers of the Park Collegium directed by Stratton Bull for sharing their ideas and in turn stimulating my own. The resulting performance editions, edited by Scott Metcalfe with Fabrice Fitch, will be published online. Thanks also to Ryan O’Sullivan for pointing me to some of the more obscure existing literature on initial rests, and to Brett Kostrzewski and Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl for their thoughts on an earlier draft.

¹ In rare cases, there are upbeat without opening rests, i.e., where the metrical sense of a composition requires one to interpret the first note as an upbeat. For example, in the manuscript Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Ny kgl. samling 1848 2°, the anonymous *Bon vin, je ne te puis laisser* (p. 213) has to start on an upbeat, and the anonymous *Bon temps, je ne te puis laisser* (p. 376) should be sung in *tempus perfectum* with an upbeat, despite no opening rests and the sign Φ . Transcriptions of both can be found in Carlo Bosi, ‘Caught in the Web of Texts: The Chanson Family *Bon vin / Bon temps* and the Disputed Identity of “Gaspart”’, in *Gaspar van Weerbeke: New Perspectives on his Life and Music*, ed. Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl and Paul Kolb (Turnhout, 2019), 259–60, Examples 14.1 and 14.2. Such examples tend to occur when scribes are not aware of the metrical sense of compositions.

Instances of opening rests in all voices occur most frequently in songs, where composers use a musical anacrusis to reflect a textual one: that is, an upbeat is used so that the musical accent can coincide with the second syllable of text. And among fifteenth-century sources of polyphonic songs, the Leuven Chansonnier (hereafter LC) not only has a particularly high concentration of such instances, it also has a few instances where the opening rests seem to have caused problems for the scribe.² Regardless of whether the book was used or even intended for practical use in performance, the scribal approach to notational elements such as opening rests would have been essentially the same.³ And while opening rests might seem a trivial notational detail to fixate upon, their implications for composition, transmission, and performance are broader than one might expect, not to mention that they help us engage with the newly discovered songs in the LC.

Opening Rests in Theory

The issues surrounding opening rests have tended to be ignored by both medieval and contemporary theorists. One rare passing reference to opening rests in polyphony is found in Tinctoris's *Liber de arte contrapuncti*, as an exception to his first rule of counterpoint: only if a song is preceded by rests is it allowed to begin with an imperfect (and not a perfect) consonance.⁴ As an example, he gives the beginning of a two-voice song in *tempus perfectum*, each voice beginning with a minim rest (see Figure 1).⁵ Still, the relative lack of references in fifteenth-century theory reflects the exceptional nature of the phenomenon: either it is not important enough to mention, perhaps because it was considered self-evident, or it does not fit within the scope of the theory being presented.

However, theorists did frequently talk about rests as indicators or signs of mensuration. Anna Maria Busse Berger referred to these as 'mode-rest signs', which developed from the older square or rectangular mode signs.⁶ Within a treatise on mensuration, this could occur in the section on rests and/or in the section on the signs of mensuration. John Hothby's chapter on rests clarifies that a rest proceeding through

² Leuven, Alamire Foundation, Ms. 1. Other manuscripts mentioned here include the other so-called Loire Valley chansonniers: Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Ms. Thott 291 8° ('Copenhagen Chansonnier') [Cop]; Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 517 ('Dijon Chansonnier') [Dij]; Washington DC, Library of Congress, Ms. M2.1 L25 Case ('Laborde Chansonnier') [Lab]; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de Musique, Rés. Vmc Ms. 57 ('Nivelle Chansonnier') [Niv]; and Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Ms. Guelf. 287 Extrav. ('Wolfenbüttel') [Wolf].

³ Jane Alden, who suggests that it is unlikely the Loire Valley chansonniers were used as performance texts, nevertheless points to the Dijon Scribe's particular attention to notational details including ligatures, coloration, and line breaks, also citing the short practical treatise preceding the songs themselves; see *Songs, Scribes, and Society: The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers* (New York, 2010), 160-61 and 167-68.

⁴ 'Si tamen aliqua pausa cantum antecesserit, cantus ipse per imperfectam concordantiam incipere poterit'; transcribed from Valencia, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 835, fol. 139^v. See also the translation and transcription of the music example in Johannes Tinctoris, *The Art of Counterpoint (Liber de Arte Contrapuncti)*, trans. and ed. Albert Seay, *Musicological Studies and Documents* 5 (s. l., 1961), 132. This passage is cited in George Morton Jones, 'The "First" Chansonnier of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, Codex 2794: A Study in the Method of Editing 15th-Century Music' (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1972), 134.

⁵ This song, given the text 'J'aime qui m'aime', is otherwise unknown; see David Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs, 1415-1480* (Oxford, 1999), 194.

⁶ Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Mensuration and Proportion Signs: Origins and Evolution* (Oxford, 1993), 15-20.

Figure 1. Valencia, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 835, detail from fol. 139^v
(music example from Tinctoris, *Liber de Arte Contrapuncti*, third book, ch. 1)

three spaces (i.e., between the staff lines) is a perfect long rest, and one proceeding through two spaces is an imperfect long rest. Likewise, three long rests grouped together signifies a perfect maxima, and two long rests grouped together an imperfect maxima.⁷ Finally, if two semibreve rests are found together, a breve has the value of three semibreves.⁸

While Hothby in this treatise did not use the terms ‘modus’, ‘tempus’, and ‘prolatio’, instead defining the value of each note, a similar passage in Bartolomeus Ramis de Pareia’s *Musica practica* makes the mensural implications of rests more explicit.⁹ Three consecutive long rests, whether placed between the same staff lines or not, indicate perfect major modus (i.e., three longs in a maxima); two indicate imperfect major modus (i.e., two longs in a maxima).¹⁰ A long rest occupying three spaces between the staff lines indicates perfect minor modus (i.e., three breves in a long); a long occupying two spaces indicates imperfect minor modus (i.e., two breves in a long).¹¹ Finally, two semibreve rests indicate perfect tempus and two minim rests indicate ‘prolatio perfecta’ (his term for three minims in a semibreve).¹²

⁷ ‘Pausa longe significans longam perfectam transit per tria spatia, et imperfectum significans transit per duo spatia. Et si sint tres simul copulate, significant maximam perfectam, et si due, maximam imperfectam.’ John Hothby, *Regule cantus mensurati*, in Hothby, *Opera omnia de musica mensurabili*, ed. Gilbert Reaney, Corpus Scriptorum de Musica 31 (s. l., 1983), at 22. See also the similar chapter in *De cantu figurato secundum Hothbi*, edited in the same volume, 43.

⁸ ‘Item quando inveniuntur due pause semibrevis, denotat brevem valentem tres semibreves secundum communem usum’; Hothby, *Opera omnia*, 22. Hothby also stated that minim rests did not indicate any figure (‘aliqua figura’), i.e., the length of the semibreve, unless there were two or three minim rests placed together: ‘Pausa minime...nec per istam cognoscitur aliqua figura, nisi tres vel due simul ponuntur’; Hothby, *Opera omnia*, 22. Two or three minim rests would seem to imply that semibreves would have to be perfect (what other theorists might call major prolation), though that is not stated explicitly.

⁹ Selections here are transcribed from *Musica practica Bartolomei Rami de Pareia Bononiae*, ed. Johannes Wolf, Publikationen der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft, Beihefte, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1901), as presented on the Thesaurus Musicarum Latinarum, <<http://boethius.music.indiana.edu/tml/15th/RAMP3T1>> (accessed 16 April 2019). See also Bartolomeo Ramis de Pareia, *Musica practica*, commentary and trans. Clement A. Miller, *Musicological Studies and Documents* 44 (s. l., 1993), especially 146–53.

¹⁰ ‘Cum enim tres pausas longae positae simul aut una praecedente alias duas simul vel omnes tres solutae in aliquo cantu inspexerimus, pro cui dubio maiorem modum et exinde maximam longas tres valere via artis intelligimus. Quod si binae ponantur et binae, imperfectum esse iudicamus.’

¹¹ ‘Verum si eadem pausa longae tria occupet spatia, minorem perfectum et ex hoc longam tres breves valere arte cognoscimus; imperfectum vero, si duo tantum occupet spatia.’

¹² ‘[...] quando duas temporis tertias volunt insinuare, duas pausas semibrevis unam iuxta aliam hoc modo [image of two semibreve rests] disponunt; et tunc perfectum esse tempus recte cognoscimus, quia totam pausam brevis tres

Tintoris, in the section on the signs of quantities in his treatise *De regulari valore notarum*, was equally clear. Just as the sign of perfect tempus is a circle, the sign of perfect major modus is three consecutive long rests, placed before or after the tempus sign.¹³ The sign of imperfect major modus is two consecutive long rests, or just one or none.¹⁴ A long rest through three spaces is the sign of perfect minor modus; through two spaces, imperfect minor modus.¹⁵ Tintoris did not, however, say anything about semibreve or minim rests indicating tempus or prolation.

In his 1496 *Practica musicae*, Gaffurius addressed these issues in both the section on rests and the section on modus. He proposed different signs for major modus, with two consecutive long rests indicating perfect major modus.¹⁶ More significantly, to clarify how one should treat such opening rests, he said that some rests are ‘essential’ and ‘indicative’ (‘essentialiter & indicialiter...pernotari’), as in the tenor of Dunstaple’s *Veni sancte spiritus* (see Figure 2a). They are ‘essential’ because they have to be counted while the triplum and motetus are singing the opening duo, and they are ‘indicative’ because they indicate both perfect major modus and perfect minor modus.¹⁷ But when rests are placed before the sign of tempus, they are indicative but unmeasured. In the example he gave, the rests again indicate perfect major and minor modus, but they are not to be counted: the tenor begins simultaneously with the cantus (see Figure 2b).¹⁸

As with Hothby and Ramis but unlike Tintoris, Gaffurius also said that two consecutive semibreve rests were an indication of *tempus perfectum*: ‘[s]ome indicate the ternary and perfect division of breves by writing two semibreve rests at the beginning of a song, and counting them with the following notes in this way’.¹⁹ Gaffurius later clarifies that two such rests can also appear in *tempus imperfectum*

minores valere intelligimus, ex quo ibi duae tertiae et non tota integra posita sunt.’ For Ramis, ‘prolatio maior’ is the number of semiminims to the minim; like normal prolation, it can be either perfect or imperfect. Ramis wrote a ‘mathematical demonstration’ (‘mathematica demonstratio’) that the minim could be divided into three semiminims, but he did not say how one would indicate perfect or imperfect ‘prolatio maior’.

¹³ ‘Signum modi maioris perfecti est positio trium pausarum longalium simul immediate ante vel post signum temporale’; see the edited Latin text and an English translation at Tintoris, *De regulari valore notarum*, ed. as part of Johannes Tintoris, *Complete Theoretical Works*, principal investigator Ronald Woodley <<http://earlymusictheory.org/Tintoris/texts/deregularivalorenotarum/>> (accessed 26 March 2019).

¹⁴ ‘Signum modi maioris imperfecti est positio duarum longalium pausarum immediate ante vel post signum temporale, vel unius tantum post ipsum temporale signum, vel prorsus nullius’.

¹⁵ ‘Signum modi minoris perfecti est longalis pausa tria occupans spatia ante vel post signum temporale immediate posita [...]. Signum modi minoris imperfecti est longalis pausa duo occupans spatia ante vel post signum temporale immediate posita’.

¹⁶ ‘Duabus vero trium temporum pausis appositis quas longas pausas perfectis diximus: maiorem modum perfectum maxime notulae inesse iudicantur.’ Gaffurius’s treatise is transcribed here and elsewhere from the copy of the first edition (Milan, 1496) at Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, Ink.2426(2). See also the English translation of Book 2, Chapter 7 in Franchinus Gaffurius, *Practica musicae*, trans. Clement A. Miller, *Musicological Studies and Documents* 20 (s. 1, 1968), 84. On this sign of major modus, see the discussion in Busse Berger, *Mensuration and Proportion Signs*, 16–17.

¹⁷ ‘Solent a plerisque pausae huiusmodi longae essentialiter & indicialiter inter cantilenae notulas pernotari. Essentialiter dico: quum tot breves ommittendas notulis alterius partis (puta supremae) commensurent: quot fuerint ipsarum in-composita inter lineas intervalla. Indicialiter vero quod modum maiorem indicent perfectum duae ipsae: perfectum quoque minore unica quod expresse probatur in praescripto tenore: Veni sancte spiritus’.

¹⁸ ‘Plerumque autem incommensurabiles disponuntur videlicet indicialiter tantum: quum scilicet antecedunt temporis signum videlicet circulum vel semicirculum in principio cantilenae descriptum: tunc enim duae ipsae trium temporum [sic] pausae modum tantum maiorem perfectum declarant: tertia minorem quod & Tintoris in tenore sui magistralis moteti: Difficiles alios delectat pangere cantus decenter consignavit’.

¹⁹ ‘Sunt & qui perfectam ac ternariam in brevibus notulis divisionem probant duabus semibrevis notularum pausis principio cantilenae descriptis quas ceteris quidem subsequentibus figuris connumerant hoc modo’; translation from Gaffurius, *Practica musicae*, trans. Miller, 87.

Figure 2. Gaffurius, *Practica musice* (Milan, 1496), copy: Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, Ink.2426(2)
a. Tenor of Dunstaple's *Veni sancte spiritus* (detail from fol. aa7^v)

b. Tenor with indicative but unmeasured rests (detail from fol. aa7^v)

when the first rest belongs to the preceding note and the second to the following note; indeed this is probably why Gaffurius, unlike Hothby and Ramis, limits this rule to the beginning of a song. In the small, inline woodcut image which follows the quoted passage, there is a rare theoretical example of opening rests of the sort that can be found in practice in the song repertoire (see Figure 3). Because this is not presented in a polyphonic context, the potential performance issues are not addressed. The quoted passage nevertheless makes it clear that these rests are both indicative—in that they indicate the tempus—and essential—in that they are to be counted.

References to opening rests are almost as difficult to find in the modern theoretical literature. One passing reference comes from David Maw talking about Machaut's

Figure 3. Gaffurius, *Practica musice* (Milan, 1496),
example of indicative semibreve rests (detail from fol. aa8^r)

monophonic virelais, who remarked that '[s]everal of the songs begin with rests indicating an anacrusis, a phenomenon not recognized by contemporary mensural theory but one that clearly points to a metrical practice underpinning the rhythm.'²⁰ T. Herman Keahey mentioned two examples by Pierre de la Rue, at the beginning of the Gloria of the *Missa Sancta Dei genitrix* and the second 'Kyrie' of the *Missa Sub tuum praesidium*.²¹ The latter case is particularly interesting as some scribes and printers 'corrected' the unusual opening either by lengthening the semibreve upbeat to a perfect breve, or by eliminating the opening rests and moving the downbeat two semibreves earlier.²² Closer to the repertoire at hand, George Morton Jones briefly discussed the opening rests in Binchois's *Pour prison* in the context of Tinctoris's first rule of counterpoint.²³ John Andrew Bailey and Beth Anne Lee-De Amici analyzed examples of 'anacrusis' in the context of the so-called 'wraparound' from the medial cadence back to the opening of a rondeau, offering new suggestions for performance practice.²⁴ In doing so, they came across at least one instance of opening rests indicating minor modus.²⁵

Most relevant is a short essay by Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, who lists eight songs in the Loire Valley chansonniers beginning with at least a breve rest in all voices.²⁶ While published before the discovery of the LC, both instances of this in the LC, *S'il advient* (No. 17) and *Quant ce viendra* (No. 43), are already on the list. Christoffersen argues that this practice stems from the generation preceding the chansonniers, with four comparable instances in the chansons of Binchois. Most cases involve a breve rest followed by two semibreve rests in *tempus perfectum*. He does not mention any potential

²⁰ He then cites Anonymous IV's concept of 'principium ante principium' as referring to such examples in polyphony; see David Maw, 'Meter and Word Setting: Revising Machaut's Monophonic Virelais', in *Current Musicology* 74 (2002), 7. This concept is also discussed in Roesner, 'The Emergence of *Musica Mensurabilis*', in *Studies in Musical Sources and Style: Festschrift for Jan la Rue*, ed. Edward H. Roesner (Madison, WI, 1990), 41-74 at 52.

²¹ Pierre de la Rue, *Opera omnia*, vol. 6, ed. Nigel St. John Davison, J. Evan Kreider, and T. Herman Keahey, *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 97/6 (s. l., 1996), 3 (Gloria, b. 1) and 47 (b. 59), discussed at p. xxvii. Thanks to Brett Kostrzewski for first pointing me to the example from the *Missa Sub tuum praesidium*.

²² Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, Ms. 9126; Jena, Universitätsbibliothek, Chorbuch 12; and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 15496 all include the opening rests, though the scribe of the third of these erased the two semibreve rests and the upbeat semibreve in the tenor, replacing them with a perfect breve. This alternative solution is also given in Ottaviano Petrucci, *Missa Antonii de Fevin* (Venice, 1515) [RISM 1515¹] and Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ms. E. 46 Inf. The second alternative, simply eliminating the rests, occurs in Hieronymus Formschneider, *Missae tredecim quatuor vocum* (Nuremberg, 1539) [RISM 1539²]. See La Rue, *Opera omnia*, xxvii.

²³ Jones, 'The "First" Chansonnier', 133-35.

²⁴ John Bailey and Beth Lee-De Amici, 'Bridging the Medial Caesura: The Wraparound Rondeau', in *Binchois Studies*, ed. Andrew Kirkman and Dennis Slavin (Oxford, 2000), 181-98.

²⁵ Specifically in Busnoys's *Seule esgaree*; see Bailey/Lee-De Amici, 'Bridging the Medial Caesura', 182-87.

²⁶ Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, 'On Chansons Starting with a General Pause', published on the website *The Copenhagen Chansonnier and the 'Loire Valley' Chansonniers: An Open Access Project*, ed. Christoffersen, dated April 2009, <<http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/NOTES/GeneralPause.html>> (accessed 16 April 2019).

mensural meaning, instead suggesting that the device was meant to ‘insure absolute notational clarity’ when a song starts ‘with an upbeat in all voices.’²⁷ He astutely points out that such notational devices are dependent on the scribe: while Dij and Niv both include six such examples, Cop has three, Lab has one, and Wolf has none. Dij, Niv, and the LC all present *S’il advient* and *Quant ce viendra* with the extra breve rest at the opening, but this rest is not found in the concordances in either Lab or Wolf.²⁸ By limiting his study to songs with at least a breve rest in all voices, however, he overlooks some of the more exceptional cases—cases where the potential performative and scribal pitfalls become more apparent.²⁹

Opening Rests in the Leuven Chansonnier

Songs from the Loire Valley chansonniers tend to begin in one of two ways: either all voices begin simultaneously, or the entry of one or more voices is delayed due to the application of imitation. In the second category, most imitation is in two voices, just between the discantus and tenor: the contratenor enters, without rests, at the same time as the leading imitative voice.³⁰ Of the fifty compositions in the LC, twenty-one have all voices entering simultaneously without rests, and twenty begin with imitation on the downbeat—fifteen with two-voice imitation, four with three-voice imitation, and one with paired imitative duets.³¹

The remaining nine songs have opening rests in all voices. For the sake of comparison, Dij has proportionally fewer examples of opening rests in all voices, with eleven instances out of a total of 161 compositions. These songs tend to fit into two parallel categories: where all voices begin simultaneously after the opening rests, or with three-voice imitation, each voice entering on an offbeat. In the LC, five or six songs fall into the first category. *Tousdis vous voit* (No. 30), the potential sixth example, has a scribal error at this point with several possible solutions (discussed below). A straightforward instance is the already mentioned *Quant ce viendra* (No. 43), where each voice starts with a breve rest and two semibreve rests (see Figure 4). The LC has only one example in the second category, the anonymous unicum *Oublie, oublie* (No. 18). Here the discantus begins with two semibreve rests, the tenor with one breve and two semibreve rests, and the contratenor with one long and two semibreve rests, such that each entrance is offset by a breve (see Figure 5). Dij has some further instances of this type: in Busnoys’s *Joie me fuit* (Dij, fols. 29^v-30^r) and the anonymous *Ostez la moi* (fols. 79^v-80^r), all voices start with a semibreve up-beat in $\mathbb{C}$, offset by varying time

²⁷ It is unclear to me why, in the absence of any meaning with respect to modus, each voice beginning with a breve rest and two semibreve rests would be any ‘clearer’ than if they were just to begin with two semibreve rests.

²⁸ *S’il advient* is also in Cop with the breve rest.

²⁹ Opening rests are also discussed in Clemens Goldberg, *Das Chansonnier Laborde: Studien zur Intertextualität einer Liederhandschrift des 15. Jahrhunderts*, Quellen und Studien zur Musikgeschichte von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart 36 (Frankfurt, 1997), 44-45. Goldberg considers three examples in Lab to have a direct connection to the meaning of the texts being set, especially at the repeat of the opening.

³⁰ *Ou beau chastel* (No. 40) is the only example in the LC where the opening two-voice imitation involves the contratenor.

³¹ The paired imitative duets are in *Donnez l’aumosne* (No. 31), the only four-voice composition in the chansonnier. These numbers do not include the openings of the second parts of the virelais, all of which have all voices entering simultaneously without rests or a single voice delayed for the sake of two-voice imitation.

Figure 4. LC, fols. 70^v-71^r: *Quant ce viendra*, details of incipits

Figure 5. LC, fols. 22^v-23^r: *Oublie*, details of incipits

intervals. The two remaining songs in the LC, *Par malle bouche* (No. 32) and *Helas l'avoy* (No. 45), as well as possibly *Tousdis vous voit*, fit into neither category and will be discussed below.

It is not always clear if the purpose of the upbeat figure was primarily to highlight a textual stress or simply as a musical figure. Regardless, there are other musical strategies employed in the LC songs which could result in accenting the second syllable of text. Most commonly, the first note could be longer, normally a breve, such that the second syllable (and not the third) falls on the breve tactus; see *Le despourveu* (No. 7), *D'ung aultre amer* (No. 10), *J'ay pris amours* (No. 12), *Helas mon cueur* (No. 13), and many others. Indeed, the opening rhythmic motive breve–semibreve–semibreve, or sometimes semibreve–minim–minim, is found in the majority of LC songs in *tempus imperfectum*. Alternatively, in *Les treves* (No. 5) and Convert's *Se mieulx navient* (No. 22), an upbeat-like figure is used, but without any opening rests, creating a syncopated, agogic accent on the second note and syllable. In many cases only the fourth syllable has to be stressed, so the textual significance of these strategies is not always apparent.

Opening Rests and Minor Modus

As the theorists stated, the use of opening rests could clarify the quantities of mensuration. In the LC, the semibreve rests sometimes clarify the tempus, usually in conjunction with a sign of tempus. The use of mensuration signs was relatively haphazard, but it does not appear that the scribes considered such rests to be a substitute for the sign; the absence

of a $\circ$ in the discantus of *Oublie*, *oublie* is exceptional (see Figure 5).³² The breve rests, on the other hand, could signify the minor modus. For songs of this repertoire, the minor modus is invariably imperfect—or rather, when the composers conceived of the rhythmic groupings at the level of the long and not just at the level of the breve, the minor modus was always imperfect. At a practical level, then, opening breve rests could be used to indicate two things: that there *is* (imperfect) minor modus; and the location of the first notes within this metrical scheme. In *Quant ce viendra*, the semibreve rests confirm what the sign $\circ$ signifies: that the song is in *tempus perfectum*. They also show the location of the upbeat within the tempus. The breve rest preceding the semibreve rests suggests that the composition was metrically conceived in imperfect minor modus, as well as showing the location of the upbeat within the minor modus. To use Gaffurius's terms, these rests are 'indicative', both of imperfect minor modus and perfect tempus. But it is unclear if all of them are 'essential': indeed, at the repeats of the opening section, it seems musically illogical to recount the breve rests each time.

As Christoffersen demonstrated, the indicative breve rests are inconsistently notated in the sources: some scribes used them more frequently than others. This inconsistency makes sense in light of the 'inessential' character of these rests: you can perform the piece correctly regardless of how it is notated. Furthermore, the inconsistency may reflect an uncertainty in such pieces as to whether they were composed with or without minor modus. When Tinctoris defined the four 'quantities' out of which every piece of music is composed—major modus, minor modus, tempus, and prolation—he clarified that the greater quantities implied the presence of the lesser, but not vice versa. Hence a piece with minor modus has to have some sort of tempus and prolation, but a piece with tempus and prolation need not have minor modus, whether perfect or imperfect.³³ In *Quant ce viendra*, without the extra, 'indicative' breve rest, there is no indication that there *is* minor modus in the first place. There may be musical reasons for choosing to interpret it this way, but the editorial practices of occasionally adding 'indicative' rests, or indeed barring in units of minor modus as opposed to units of tempus in the absence of indicative rests, involve interpretative decisions that go beyond what the notation itself tells us.³⁴

³² By contrast, *La despourveue* and *Quant ce viendra* (see Figure 3) have a $\circ$ in all voices, even though the two semibreve rests in all voices leave no room for an alternative reading.

³³ 'Quattuor autem quantitates ab artis musice preceptoribus institutas accepimus, videlicet modum maiorem, modum minorem, tempus, et prolationem. Ex quibusquidem quattuor quantitibus omnis cantus componitur. Non quod necessarium sit in quolibet cantu omnes concurrere, nanque si prolatio sola sit cantus est ut hic: [example]. Idem si tempus sine aliquo modo, ut hic: [example]. Similiter si modus minor absque maiore, ut hic: [example]. Sed ubi modus maior ibi et minor, ubi modus minor ibi et tempus, ubi tempus ibi et prolatio; quoniam maiori semper quantitati minorem inesse necesse est' (Tinctoris, *De regulari valore notarum*). This passage comes towards the beginning of the treatise, and in what follows, Tinctoris admittedly gives rather the opposite impression. In the second half of the treatise, he defined and discussed the sixteen species of composition, each of which has all four mensural 'quantities'. This clarification at the opening may have been a concession to the practical reality that most late fifteenth-century compositions were not conceived with minor modus in mind, let alone major modus.

³⁴ Analysis of the songs can sometimes reinforce what the presence or absence of opening breve rests might indicate about minor modus. For *Quant ce viendra*, a minor modus interpretation seems to make sense, with both the medial and final cadences falling at the beginning of a long grouping, as well as a straightforward 'wrap-around' which 'preserves the modus level' (to use the words of Bailey/Lee-De Amici, 'Bridging the Medial Caesura', 183). Still, the feeling of minor modus is not strong enough to establish that the Lab and Wolf scribes were *wrong* to exclude the opening breve rest. In other cases, an odd number of breves before the final cadence does not prove that the composer was *not* thinking in terms of minor modus—as a parallel case, there are numerous fifteenth-century examples of metrical irregularities in *tempus perfectum*. But such analytical details might nevertheless lead us to avoid overgeneralizing about, for example, the implications of the stroke sign for minor modus.

Figure 6. LC, fols. 73^v-74^r: *Helas l'avoy*, details of incipits

Example 1. *Helas l'avoy*, bb. 1-4, corrected

Scribal Errors Relating to Opening Rests

Of the nine pieces with opening rests in all voices, the LC contains two mistakes which are directly related to these rests.³⁵ These are predictable: they both concern cases where one of the voices has a different number of opening rests. The anonymous *Helas l'avoy* as notated begins with a breve rest in the tenor and contratenor but without rests in the discantus. The discantus does have to start before the tenor and contra, but only a semibreve before; it is missing an opening semibreve rest. It is easy to see how something like this might come about: this is an odd example which does not fit into the standard categories. Presumably someone in the line of transmission had the insight that the discantus has to start first, and therefore assumed it should not have any opening rests (see Figure 6 and Example 1).³⁶

The second case, *Tousdis vous voit*, is somewhat less clear, for there are multiple possible corrections.³⁷ As notated, each voice has an opening semibreve rest (see Figure 7),

³⁵ For the sake of comparison, Dij has (by my count) six cases where one of the voices has an incorrect number of opening rests, but all of these mistakes occur in pieces where at least one voice opens without rests. In the eleven pieces there with opening rests in all voices, the scribe was particularly careful to avoid mistakes.

³⁶ Andrea Lindmayr-Brandl pointed out to me that the flat signature in the discantus, unlike those of the tenor and contratenor, is placed after the mensuration sign. While key signatures and mensuration signs are notated inconsistently in the LC, when both are found next to each other, the key signature usually precedes the mensuration sign. Here there is plenty of space for the missing rest, as if the scribe was unsure whether to include it, and then never got around to checking and fixing the mistake.

³⁷ All of these solutions were discussed at the workshop in Leuven in February 2018.

but the tenor is one breve shorter than the other voices. To make up the time, one could change the semibreve ligature into a breve ligature (see Example 2a).³⁸ This would assume that someone in the line of transmission had mistakenly added the upward stem at the beginning of the ligature. But even though this seems a relatively minor visual aspect, ligatures are rarely a cause of confusion, other than with regard to pitch. A second possible correction is adding a breve after the first semibreve, which works particularly well with the text (see Example 2b).³⁹ But there is a third option: add a breve rest before the tenor's semibreve rest, so that the tenor enters one breve after the discantus and contratenor (see Example 2c).⁴⁰ Such unusual opening rests—semibreve in discantus and contra, but a breve *and* semibreve in the tenor—could have been a cause of confusion for the scribe, especially as the breve rest could have been (wrongly) interpreted as an unmeasured rest indicative of minor modus. When the upbeat is sung simultaneously in all voices, the first two semibreves are contrapuntally unproblematic, and a scribe might therefore have sought to 'correct' the original version by giving each voice the same number of opening rests. I see this as the most likely source of confusion, and therefore I prefer this option.

Figure 7. LC, fols. 45^v-46^r: *Tousdis vous voit*, details of incipits

Example 2. *Tousdis vous voit*, bb. 1-5, three possible solutions

a. Ligature changed

³⁸ This was the solution chosen in David J. Burn, *Leuven Chansonier: Study*, Leuven Library of Music in Facsimile 1 (Antwerp, 2017), study volume, 84-86.

³⁹ I believe I first proposed this solution at the workshop, and Scott Metcalfe used it in the final version of his edition of the unica.

⁴⁰ This was the original solution proposed by Metcalfe, and it was also proposed as an alternative in Burn, *Leuven Chansonier*, 84-86.

b. Extra breve note

Tous - dis vous voit mon

Tous - dis vous voit mon

Tous - dis vous voit mon

c. Extra breve rest

Tous - dis vous voit mon

Tous - dis vous voit

Tous - dis vous voit mon

Compositional Issues Relating to Opening Rests

To be somewhat more speculative and provocative, opening rests can in some cases point to aspects of compositional process. In another anonymous unicum, *Par malle bouche* (No. 32), the discantus and tenor both begin with one breve rest, and the contratenor with one semibreve rest. This is similar to *Helas l'avoy*, but both are exceptional cases. Like most songs in the LC, the discantus-tenor duet in *Par malle bouche* is contrapuntally complete; the contratenor is contrapuntally unnecessary. There is one contrapuntal anomaly in the song, where the discantus and contratenor are at the interval of a seventh for an offbeat minim (see Example 3).⁴¹ Despite looking blatantly wrong on the page, there is evidence that this was not a scribal corruption: rather, it was composed this way.⁴² Without the contratenor, the discantus-tenor duet is perfectly idiomatic, with imitation offset by a semibreve. If there were any corruption, it would presumably have to be in the contratenor. The contra itself is perfectly concordant with the tenor, but not with the discantus. There is no correction that does not either break the imitation in the discantus and tenor or make the contratenor melodically unidiomatic. If a later, musically cognizant scribe were to have copied this from the LC, it is easy to imagine that this anomaly might have been 'corrected' in one form or another; a modern editor might justifiably choose to do the same. But it

⁴¹ Textual reconstruction following Metcalfe's most recent version.

⁴² Those of us at the workshop did not agree as to whether this was a mistake, and if so, how it might be 'corrected'. I believe I was the only one willing to accept the reading as it stands.

Example 3. *Par malle bouche*, bb. 19-23, as notated

Example 4. *J'ay des semblans*, bb. 22-29, as notated

⁴⁴ Here Metcalfe chose (I think wisely) to leave the dissonance in place.

There is a limit to what we can know about compositional process, but dissonance of this sort—between the discantus and contratenor, where the tenor is individually concordant with both, all voices are melodically idiomatic, and there is no clear corruption—suggests that the contratenor would have been composed after the discantus-tenor duet.⁴⁵ In *Par malle bouche*, the unusual opening rests provide another indication of this (see Example 5). As a duet, the discantus and tenor would presumably have been composed without the opening breve rests.⁴⁶ Later, the composer decided to anticipate the opening rhythm and melodic contour of the discantus and tenor in the contratenor, which therefore has to enter a semibreve earlier on the offbeat. The unusual opening rests are thus the result of a series of successive compositional decisions.

Example 5. *Par malle bouche*, bb. 1-3

As mentioned, opening rests were frequently used to create a musical upbeat which helps accent the second syllable of text. *Par malle bouche* is one clear exception: the opening rests simply enable the contratenor to enter earlier than the discantus and tenor. A second exception is *Si vous voulez* (No. 34), another anonymous unicum in the LC. All three voices start with two semibreve rests in perfect time. But none of the voices follow this with the expected semibreve upbeat. Each voice has the same rhythmic motive—dotted semibreve, minim, semibreve—appearing multiple times and generally incorporating a descending third. This motive starts variously on the first or third beat of the tempus, offset between the voices. The result is a rhythmic uncertainty within the tempus which is only resolved at the end of the phrase (see Example 6a). It is so uncertain, in fact, that if you were to sing it without the semibreve rests at the beginning, you would not know anything was wrong until you reached what would then be a hypermetric bar preceding the cadence (see Example 6b). Hypermetric bars of this sort are not an infrequent occurrence in mid-fifteenth-century music. And the opening rests here might

⁴⁵ Such an approach has been characterized as ‘successive composition’, a term which has (sometimes unfairly) been critiqued as coming from the assumption that composers were not able to mentally conceive of music for more than two voices. Just because a song is contrapuntally complete without the contratenor does not mean that the contratenor was not conceived simultaneously with the discantus and tenor; see for example Margaret Bent, ‘The Grammar of Early Music: Preconditions for Analysis’, in *Tonal Structures in Early Music*, ed. Cristle Collins Judd (London, 1998), 15-59 at 31-33. That said, compositional details—such as this sort of dissonance—can provide compelling evidence for the contratenor to have been written later in the compositional process.

⁴⁶ There is no reason to assume the composer was thinking in terms of minor modus.

⁴⁷ A related example could be the second 'Kyrie' from Pierre de la Rue's *Missa Sub tuum praesidium* mentioned earlier; see n. 22. There, the process was almost certainly the reverse: the movement was composed with opening rests, and in RISM 1539² they were removed. The removal of the rests also eliminates a rhythmic irregularity at the end of the movement present in most sources.

a. As notated

b. Without opening rests

Si vous voulez

Tenor

Si vous voulez

Contra

Si vous voulez

5

lez

lez que

lez

My choice to examine the apparently minor musical feature of opening rests in such detail is based on the premise that they are, in fact, exceptional. At least numerically, this is definitely the case; the LC itself is unusual in containing so many examples. Some theorists likewise presented a case for interpreting opening rests as distinct from normal rests, as they could (also) be signs of mensuration. Musical practice does not line up precisely with the theory, but there too we see opening rests being used to indicate minor *modus* and/or *tempus*. For composers, opening rests were sometimes not what was originally intended but rather a notational fix to issues arising during composition. And for scribes as for performers, when the opening rests do not follow the standard procedures, they are a potential cause of confusion.

When considering the processes surrounding composition, transmission, and performance, much will inevitably remain speculative. But if we wish to understand these processes more completely, the original notation is one way in. Except for those examples with clear scribal errors, none of the songs discussed here raise issues in modern, score notation. Opening rests can only be a source of confusion for those composing, copying, or performing from notation with individually notated parts. Approaching the challenges inherent in the notation from the perspective of all types of users, we can reach new insights into very old music.

Abstract

Most polyphonic compositions of the fifteenth century have at least one voice which begins without rests. The exceptions usually use the rests to create a musical upbeat, potentially motivated by the text. In less straightforward examples, the rests have the potential to cause confusion on the part of performers or scribes. Theorists only rarely addressed this phenomenon directly, but they did discuss rests as indicators of mensuration. As examples from the *Leuven Chansonier* (Leuven, Alamire Foundation, Ms. 1) demonstrate, opening *semibreve* rests can be interpreted as indicating perfect or imperfect *tempus*, and opening *breve* rests as indicating imperfect minor *modus*. In two unusual cases, confusion over opening rests may have been directly responsible for scribal errors. Two further songs show how opening rests may have been a notational fix to issues arising during composition, thus shedding light on the compositional process. By examining the unique challenges that the original notation poses to all of its users, we can reach new insights into composition, transmission, and performance.