

Mo' Better Motets: Mostly Motets of the 15th and 16th Centuries

A selection of motets, mostly from the 15th and 16th centuries. Jeffrey Dean's article "Listening to Motets" in *Early Music* 1979 (?) makes the point that motets and other sacred polyphony, until the mid-16th century, may have been composed to a great degree for the listening pleasure of the singers themselves, rather than fulfilling a strictly liturgical role. Anyone who has sung or played polyphony from this period will know the joy that can be found in actually participating in making this music. By the mid-16th century, however, polyphonic masses and motets were more often composed to fill church requirements, perhaps explaining the increase in the number of prolific composers like Palestrina and Lassus. The history is not quite this simple, but it speaks to my own enjoyment of exploring the music of this period.

Composer	Piece	Edition	History
Anonymous	Solitude in the Grove a 4	cpdl	American shape-note hymn
Eric Haas	Fantasia on a shape-note hymn a 4	ARS MLE	Based on Solitude in the Grove. ARS 2018 Play-the-Recorder-Month piece.
Guillaume Du Fay (1397-1474)	Alma redemptoris mater II a 3	Hetlund on cpdl	Cantilena motet in honor of BVM, based on antiphon.
Johannes Ockeghem (ca. 1410-1497)	Ave Maria a 4	LPM 518	Marian antiphon. No borrowed material. Perfect small motet.
Alexander Agricola (ca. 1445-1506)	Sy dederò a 3	cpdl	Chanson motet. Paraphrases Lenten responsorial chant for Matins. Possibly meant for instruments. One of most popular short works in its period, in 22 poly sources, 5 tablatures.
Orlande de Lassus (ca. 1530-1594)	Prophetiae sibyllarum: Prologue (Carmina Chromatico)	CW 48	Extremely chromatic. Prologue to cycle of 12 motets setting of the Sybilline Prophecies, foretelling Christ. Images seen on floor of Sistine Chapel, floor of Siena Cathedral, Borgia Apartments of Vatican, elsewhere. Lassus' set a gift to his employer Albrecht V of Bavaria.
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594)	Nigra sum sed formosa a 5	cpdl	Motet setting of verses from Song of Songs, part of nearly complete setting of book by Palestrina. Acts like a madrigal, but it's a motet.
William Byrd (ca. 1540-1623)	Salve regina a 4	cpdl	Free setting of Marian antiphon for period of summer and fall. From <i>Gradualia</i> I (1605), first volume of Byrd's 2-volume collection of Catholic music for church calendar. At November 1605, ownership of this volume considered treason. 1593—Moves to Stondon Massey, Essex, near his Catholic patron Sir John Petre.