

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck

(1562-1621)

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Outline

- Life
- As a Teacher
- As a Composer
- Keyboard Works

Life

- Sweelinck studied music with the singer Jan Willemszoon in the neighboring city of Haarlem and possibly with Floris van Adrichem as well, who was the organist of St. Bavo Kerk in that city.
- Sweelinck's great musical talent was already apparent at a very young age, which led to his appointment as organist of the Oude Kerk at age 15. He remained faithfully in this position until his death in 1621, and found his last resting place there.





The Oude Delft Canal and the Oude Kerk, Delft 1675
Jan van der Heijden (1637 -1712)

Life

- In the course of the reformation in 1578, Amsterdam became calvinistic.
- Sweelinck – as a city organist –soon focused primarily on public concerts outside of the liturgy.



Life

- These concerts brought him considerable fame, which extended far beyond the borders of the city.
- In addition to his regular concerts, Sweelinck began actively teaching around 1600.



Life

- Sweelinck rarely left Amsterdam and when he did, then only to inspect organs. His only longer trip took him to Antwerp, where he purchased a harpsichord (possibly by Ruckers) for the city of Amsterdam in 1604.
- Sweelinck was known for his organ and harpsichord improvisations: more than once the proud city authorities brought important visitors to the church to hear the ‘Orpheus of Amsterdam’



- Sweelinck was buried in the Oude Kerk in 1621.



Fishing for Souls (Zielenvisserij), 1614
Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne (1589 - 1662)

As a Teacher

- Numerous talented pupils from Northern and Central Germany flocked to Amsterdam to study with him – often staying for an average of two years.
- The list of Sweelinck pupils includes the names of many eminent German organists:
 - ❖ Jacob and Johann Praetorius (Hamburg)
 - ❖ Heinrich Scheidemann (Hamburg)
 - ❖ Ulrich Cernitz (Hamburg)
 - ❖ Paul Siefert (Danzig)
 - ❖ Melchior Schildt (Hanover)
 - ❖ August Brücken (Berlin)
 - ❖ Samuel and Gottfried Scheidt (Halle)
 - ❖ Andreas and Martin Düben (Leipzig).



As a Teacher

- Sweelinck's reputation as a teacher remained legendary all the way down to the eighteenth century. In 1740, for example, Johann Mattheson called him the "hamburgischen Organistenmacher"*

* "Hamburg organist-maker" Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte*, Hamburg 1740, Lipmannssohn, Berlin 1910, p. 332.



As a Teacher

- A notable by-product of Sweelinck's pedagogical activities is his translation and adaptation of large sections from the third part of Zarlino's "*Le istituzioni harmoniche*" (3/1573), which was preserved in a German version through the work of his Hamburg pupils.

LE ISTITVTIONI HARMONICHE

DEL REVERENDO M. GIOSEFFO ZARLINO,
DA CHIOGGIA;

Nelle quali; oltre le materie appartenenti

ALLA MVSICA;

Si trouano dichiarati molti luoghi
di Poeti, d'Historici, & di Filosofi;

Si come nel leggerle si potrà chiaramente vedere.

¶ Qui dicitur, dicitur lexus pax.
Kai pò dicitur, dicitur lexus pax.



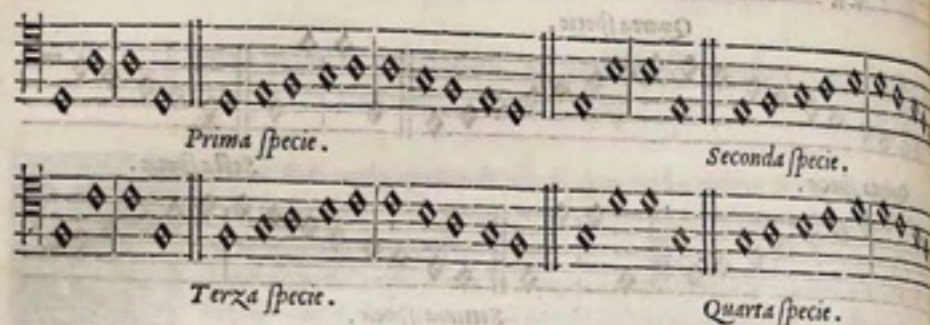
Con Priuilegio dell' Illustris. Signoria di Venetia,
per anni X.

IN VENETIA,

Appresso Francesco Senese, al segno della Pace.

M D L X I I.

cento, che le sue specie sono quattro: Imperoche essendo tali estremi tramezzati da altre chorde...



Et ciascuna di loro contiene in se cinque voci, o suoni, & quattro intervalli; che hanno tra loro...



ne di Boetio... che non si curasse di porre esattamente il vero della cosa...

Della Diatessaron, ouer Quarta. Cap. 14.

ne in pro... me tri... a 3. d... rinto.

La Diatessaron, la quale è la minor parte principale della Diapason, la cui forma...



Questa (come ho detto altroue) da i Greci è chiamata prima Sinfonia, ouero (come la nomina Filone Gio...

Del Ditono, ouer Terza maggiore. Cap. 15.



EGVE dopo la Diatessaron senza alcun mezzo la consonanza nominata Ditono, che è...



Et tal differenza nasce dalla varietà delli suoi intervalli: conciosia che nel primo intervallo della prima specie...

Handwritten notes in the right margin: 'tunc... 17944'.

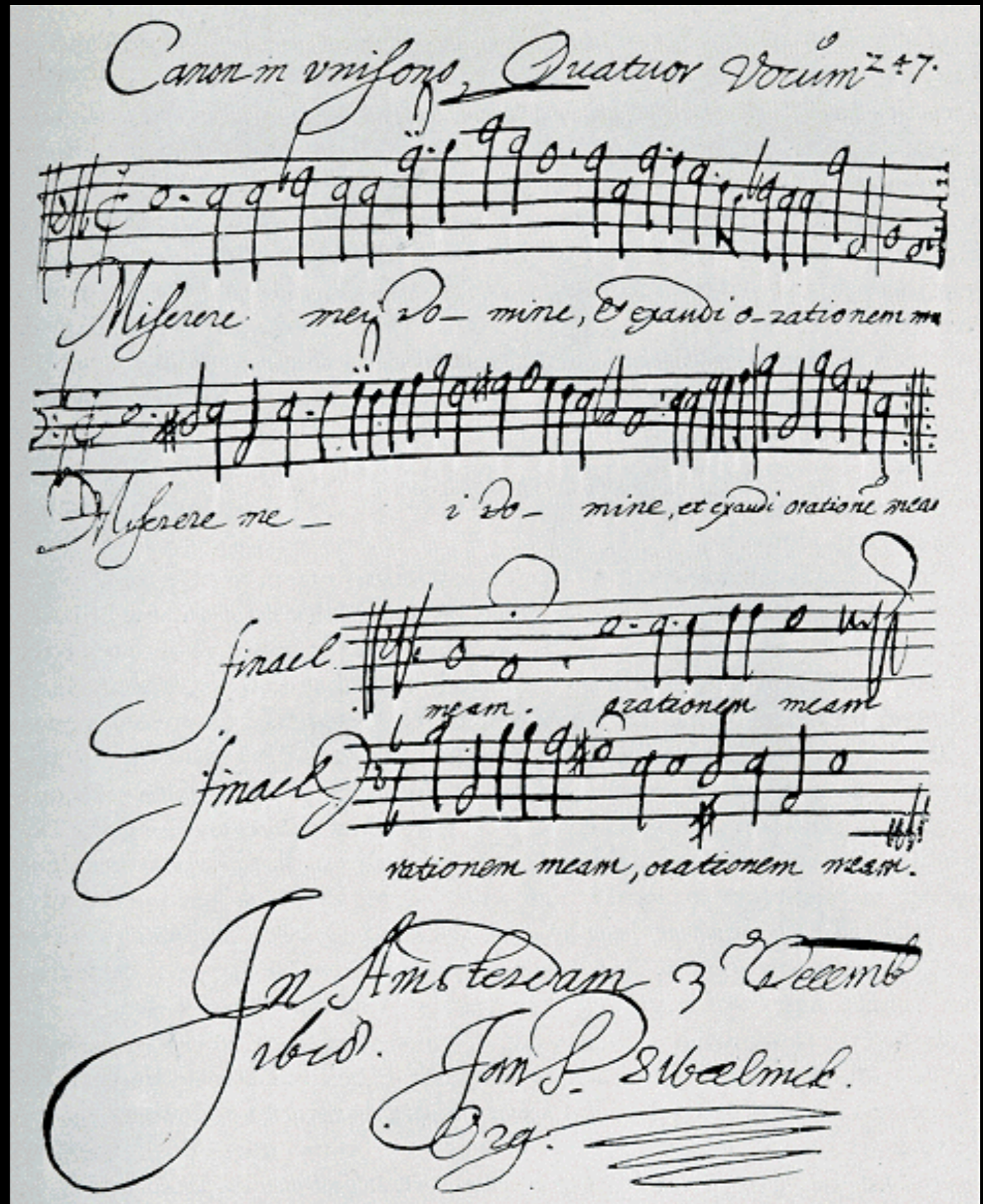
As a Composer

- As well as being one of the most famous organists and teachers of his time, Sweelinck was the last and most important composer of the musically rich golden era of the Netherlanders.
- His keyboard music is now seen to be less the work of an innovator than of one who perfected forms derived from, among others, the English virginalists and transmitted them through his pupils to north Germany.



As a Composer

- His immediate influence can be seen in the music of Samuel Scheidt and Anthoni van Noordt.
- His surviving output amounts to 254 vocal works, including 33 chansons, 19 madrigals, 39 motets and 153 psalms, as well as about 70 keyboard works, principally in the form of fantasias, echo fantasias, toccatas and variations.





Keyboard Works

- Sweelinck did not begin composing his own keyboard music until after 1605. The works have seem almost to be a summary, a written-down synthesis of his improvisatory and didactic activities.
- Sweelinck's works in the free forms – fantasias and toccatas – were developed from similar works by Italians (Andrea Gabrieli, Merulo) and Englishmen (Bull, Philips).
- The passage-work is perhaps less brilliant than the Italians' but has a more structural purpose, and there are no traces of colourist ornamentation.

Keyboard Works

- Toccatas
- A very effective compositional tool found in his toccatas is the frequent use of brilliant runs over a wide tonal range.
- His toccatas have the same compositional structure: an imitative middle section is enclosed by virtuoso passagework before and after. This also shows the influence of Venetian models such as Claudio Merulo (1533–1604).
- The various technical difficulties – above all the manner in which they are incorporated into the toccatas – point to a pedagogical purpose.

Keyboard Works

- Fantasias
- His fantasias are built on a single theme and are usually fugal in character, presenting the theme in augmentation and diminution and introducing a number of secondary themes developed either independently in fugato or used as counterpoints to the main theme. They are in several sections, interspersed with free interludes and imitative sections on important secondary themes, and they have a toccata-like close.
- From a historical point of view they have a special place among Sweelinck's works, for they led the way to the later development of the monothematic fugue.

Keyboard Works

- Echo Fantasias
 - The echo fantasias form a separate genre. They are actually free fantasias without a basic theme; they contain homophonic sections in which there is extensive use of echo effects achieved by alteration of register (octave transposition) or colour (use of different manuals), and there are also sections which employ various canonic techniques.

Keyboard Works

- Variations
- Sweelinck was also attracted to variation form, in which the style of his music points clearly to the English Virginalists, some of whom, notably Bull and Philips, were among his acquaintances.
- His variation cycles tend to form ordered units and are not a random selection of individual variations. The settings of secular melodies are characterized by the development in each variation of a new musical idea derived from the theme.
- The chorale variations are built on another principle, which clearly shows the influence, through Bull, of William Blitheman. This involves using a different number of voices in each variation, placing the unchanged or slightly embellished cantus firmus each time in a different voice and providing variation through the change in contrapuntal treatment.

Keyboard Works

- Variations
- The “Erbarm dich mein o Herre Gott” is one of Sweelinck’s longest works. The first four movements resemble each other in their exquisite counterpoint.
- The similarity in the sound enhances counterpoint and makes it even more transparent. The following two movements of the chorale prelude are composed as descant solos over an accompaniment.
- Sweelinck did not only contribute to the refinement of this technique, he also established the chorale prelude as a genre.

References

- Pieter Dirksen, *The Keyboard Music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. Its Style, Significance and Influence*, Koninklijke Vereniging, Utrecht 1997.
- Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte*, Hamburg 1740, Lipmannssohn, Berlin 1910
- Randall H. Tollefsen and Pieter Dirksen. "Sweelinck, Jan Pieterszoon." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press.
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