INTRODUCTION

THE COMPOSER

Despite some twelve years of service as maestro di cappella in the Duomo of Milan, Simon Boyleau (fl. Milan and Turin c. 1544–after 1586) has never enjoyed the posthumous reputation afforded his successor Vincenzo Ruffo let alone that of his illustrious predecessor Franchino Gaffurius. Serving the Cathedral from 1484 to 1522, Gaffurius established Milan’s musical reputation, while Ruffo, during his tenure from 1563 to 1572, drew wide attention through his attempts to create a musical style that responded to the Counter-Reformation ambitions of Archbishop Carlo Borromeo. It is between these two pillars that we can situate the lesser known Simon Boyleau, a conservative musician yet one of sufficient competence and stature to have held the post of maestro di cappella for a total of nearly twelve years. Evidence of his contemporary reputation, even beyond Italian soil, is the reference made to him in Conrad Gesner’s encyclopaedic Pandectarym sive Patrimonium Universalium (Zurich, 1548). Whilst it seems clear that Boyleau’s early publications were produced in order to assist him in securing an appointment in Italy, Getz connects his appointment as chapel master at the Duomo to that of Ferrante Gonzaga as Governor of Milan from 1546 to 1554. There is no evidence, however, to suggest his arrival in the city prior to his appointment in 1551, and it is possible that the Frenchman might have resided in the Veneto during the years between the publication of the 1544 motets and this appointment to the post in Milan.

Boyleau’s employment at the Duomo divides into two periods. He was maestro di cappella from July 1551 until 1557 when he was either dismissed or resigned over disciplinary issues relating to the singers of the choir. His whereabouts and employment immediately following this incident is not clear, although he apparently had some contact with Santa Maria dell’Annunciazione alla Vecchiabbia, the convent at which Carlo Borromeo’s sister resided. He was reappointed to the Duomo as Vincenzo Ruffo’s assistant until the latter’s departure for Pistoia in June 1572, he then continued as interim maestro until July 1574, and was reappointed maestro from November 1574 until early 1577. From late 1562 until January 1569, he worked nearby at the esteemed Santa Maria presso san Celso. Leaving Milan, Boyleau joined the cappella of Turin Cathedral as a singer in 1577, and subsequently took on the position of maestro from 1583 until 1585. He was dismissed at the end of 1585, but remained in the city for some months, possibly working as organist there in 1586. Also by 1586, Boyleau was in the service of the Piemontese court in Savoy. On 28 June of that year he was rewarded by Duke Carlo Emmanuele I of Savoy for services and compositions including the instruction of a page and the composition of four sacred works for the duchy. These works include a short four-voice mass, and three motets, O sacrum convivium, Salve regina and Benedictus meus.