Ockeghem, *Missa L'homme armé*

L’homme armé
Jean de Ockeghem composed Missa L’homme arme in 1460. This work originated in the early renaissance period. The chant was common throughout the renaissance period, but compositions began to include variation. This piece was an expansion of a chant. The piece includes the chant and layers dimensional elements around it. The harmonic structure, rhythm, and structure will be analyzed.

The Kyrie is in Latin. This version is written for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass. In this recording the Alto line was sung by a gentleman. The Kyrie is repetitious due to its standard A B A prime structure. There are three parts to The Kyrie, Kyrie eleyson, then Christe eleyson, back to kyrie eleyson.

The singers were very resonant always including line in their sound. Each phrase connected to the next. The majority of their singing is straight toned until the ends of phrases where singers use vibrato to move the phrase along or crescendo. Final chords never had vibrato, which helped tune the chord. The second Kyrie eleyson in m.29 melodically changes, differing from the original.

Throughout the piece the composer generally uses the same rhythmic patterns. He places the different rhythm sets sporadically through each voice part therefore each voice part lines up only at the ends of phrases. The rhythms are executed accurately capturing the bounce like renaissance feel. Rhythmically, the tenor line is the most simplistic. In m.7 the alto line has a more difficult, semi-syncopated rhythm, which is passed to the sopranos in m. 10 carrying through the first cadence in m.13. In the second part of the Kyrie, the tempo slows and is legato. Sopranos have control of the final cadence due to their rhythmic pattern in measure 41.
The Kyrie progresses through different modes. It begins in G Mixolydian. In the third measure there is cross voicing occurring between the sopranos and altos. The tenor part is identical to the chant throughout the Kyrie until last four measures of the piece. In m.12 there is a sharp sign above the soprano note on the and of three, indicating an upcoming key change. Also, the solfege for that particular melody is do ti do which is a sign for a key change occurring. M. 13 includes the first cadence ending the A section of the Kyrie. The second part, beginning in m. 14, transitions to G Dorian. The B flats indicated from m. 17 to 21 confirms that the piece is now in G Dorian. A horizontal cadence occurs in the m. 24. The sopranos outline what look like an F chord and again have do ti do. M.25 reverts back to G Mixolydian. There are no more B flats, reason being why it is no longer in G Dorian. In the alto line at m.27, there is a sharp symbol above the third beat, C. This ordinarily would be C natural, but Ockeghem raised it to avoid the tritone. M.29 begins the third and final part of the Kyrie. Although this piece is in several modes, it has a minor sound. M.31 is a reminder that it is G Dorian since it consists of do ti la. Also, the notated flat symbols above m.33 and 34 reiterate it is G Dorian. M.37 changes it back to G Mixolydian. As previously stated, the cadence is led by the sopranos in m.40, ending the piece. The final cadence only consists of two notes.

Missa L’homme armé switches between G Mixolydian and G Dorian. Its harmonic structure changes throughout the piece specifically at each cadence and in two additional places. The chant, L’homme arme was significant to the part writing of Missa L’homme armé. It was present throughout the composition, specifically written into the tenor line. The beginning chord is the same as the first final cadenctial chord in the kyrie elyeson section. It is also identical to the final cadence of the entire composition. This is
a renaissance style cadence, having an open fifth and the octave on the top. This three part structured piece would be fitting for a chamber, early music ensemble. The tuning of the ensemble on the recording was remarkable. The sound is very open and free flowing. This composition allows singers to achieve a constant, elongated sound. For this genre of music, execution of pitch is essential. The effect of the piece will not be achieved if even one voice is out of tune. It is extremely pleasant to the ear and captivates the renaissance time period through song.

Word count: 748