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Beyond the Cadence: Post-Cadential Extension in Ockeghem’s Sacred Music

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MUSIC
Beyond the Cadence: Post-Cadential Extensions in Ockeghem’s Sacred Music

Where does a mass movement or motet by Johannes Ockeghem really end? It is tempting to argue that final cadences provide the most satisfying point of musical closure and to dismiss “post-cadential extensions” – those melodic or harmonic tags that occur after the last cadential arrival – as formulaic or insignificant. Indeed, a survey of post-cadential extensions in the masses and motets of Ockeghem reveals that almost all fit a particular melodic or harmonic formula. (See Tables 1–2 and the Appendix, which catalogue Ockeghem’s extensions and provide characteristic examples.). But the sophistication with which Ockeghem treats these formulae belies their apparent simplicity. Although a comprehensive analysis of all 62 examples is beyond the scope of this paper, my study reveals that post-cadential extensions are not simply formulaic stock gestures. On the contrary, they often reflect Ockeghem’s treatment of pre-existing material, exploiting the most memorable features of the cantus firmus or resolving modal disjunction; they also engage with the model through direct quotation or structural allusion. Furthermore, extensions play a vital role in rhythmic pacing on both local and structural levels. When regarded not merely as an afterthought but as active components of the polyphonic fabric, post-cadential extensions can provide new insights into Ockeghem’s style.

Ockeghem often uses post-cadential extensions to engage with striking aspects of the cantus firmus. The Missa De plus en plus provides an excellent example, with an unusually lengthy extension in the altus at the end of the Credo:¹

At the point of cadence the altus arrives deceptively on e', a sixth above the tenor, implying that this extension will follow the common 6-5 melodic pattern seen ten times in Ockeghem’s works. Although the altus does eventually resolve to d, it does so in a strikingly roundabout way: rather than simply resolve down by step, it wanders down a ninth in a leisurely fashion, taking two full breves to do so and ending with a daring leap of a fifth. No other single-voice post-cadential extension in Ockeghem’s works is so protracted; why this emphasis on the 6-5 descent? The answer may lie in Ockeghem’s frequent use of a 6-5 appoggiatura to reach high points throughout the mass, most notably in the discantus at the opening of the Gloria.² This melodic figure seems to be derived from the tenor of Binchois’s chanson, which soars to an e'-d' appoggiatura in its second perfection with a clearly audible and distinctive gesture:

² Ockeghem uses other forms of this appoggiatura gesture throughout the mass; see the discantus at the opening of the Kyrie (d’’ to c’’).
The emphasis Ockeghem places on the 6-5 descent at the end of the Credo, by stretching the motion to the limits of melodic plausibility, seems to emphasize the same gesture. Considering Ockeghem’s emphasis on this stepwise descent throughout the mass, it is not implausible that the post-cadential extension discussed here is also a reflection of his engagement with Binchois’s chanson.3

Ockeghem’s active interaction with his model does not end there. As Richard Sherr has noted, he attempts throughout his G-mode mass to “correct” the modal swerve to D in the final phrase of Binchois’s rondeau.4 Sherr suggests that the ambivalent ending of De plus en plus “is fine for a chanson, but will not do for a mass: mass movements cannot end ambivalently.”5 Ockeghem plays with the challenge of resolving the problematic ending of the cantus firmus throughout the mass, particularly in the sections of the Gloria and Credo that end without the tenor, but in the Agnus Dei uses post-cadential extensions to solidify the mass’s conclusion. In the Agnus Dei II, the 6-5 cadential extension appears again, this time in a simpler form:

![Musical notation image]

Here, the altus arrives on the third (b) of the final sonority before sweeping upwards to form a 6-5 appoggiatura. In the Agnus Dei III, notated under Circle (rather than Cut-C), the same gesture is repeated with a slightly different rhythmicization:

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4 Ibid., 335–39.
5 Ibid., 337.
This is one of only two instances in Ockeghem’s sacred output in which a post-cadential extension is repeated consecutively within the same movement. Sherr argues that Ockeghem is particularly concerned with creating a sense of appropriate finality (one that “corrects” the ambivalence of Binchois’s model) throughout the mass; I view these two extensions as contributing to that pattern. The very repetition of the extension lends a heightened sense of finality to the end of the movement by placing a distinctive melodic gesture at the forefront of the texture twice in succession. Furthermore, the rhythmic differences between the two extensions are more apparent on paper than in performance. Despite the longer note values in the Agnus II, the use of different mensuration signs ensures that the two sound almost identical. The only audible difference is the lack of the octave leap in the bassus in the Agnus III; the presence of the lower G in that final sonority lends it a conclusive weight not found at the end of the Agnus II. In this mass, then, post-cadential extensions reflect Ockeghem’s broader compositional strategies in two ways: first, they emphasize the 6-5 appoggiatura gesture derived from Binchois and used prominently throughout; second, they reflect Ockeghem’s interest in “correcting” his model by creating a strong sense of finality.

The post-cadential extensions in the Missa Caput reflect a similar preoccupation with another modally wayward cantus firmus. Manfred Bukofzer points out the difficulties raised by placing the Caput cantus firmus, which projects a G-Mixolydian modality and returns repeatedly to B-mi, into a mass setting that is firmly in D-Dorian; Ockeghem responds to this modal conflict by inserting a d at the end of the tenor, here the lowest-
sounding voice. Often, the added note is used to reinforce the cadential pitch after the other voices have reached the medial or final cadence, a practice which accounts for four of the mass’s seven extensions. One particularly striking example occurs at the end of the first section of the Gloria:

The tenor drops out after the last pitch of the cantus firmus while the upper voices move toward the medial cadence. This time, however, the overlapping repetition of a strongly profiled rhythmic cell (dotted minim – semiminim – minim or semibreve) at different places in the mensura creates a dramatic rhythmic “drive to the cadence.” The cadential arrival is so strong that it feels like a conclusive close to the section; when the tenor enters with its repeated d, two full semibreves after the cadence, it comes as a surprise. By emphasizing the added note in the cantus firmus, Ockeghem draws attention to the disjunction between the mode of the tenor and of the mass as a whole – a ploy strikingly similar to that used in De plus en plus. Sherr argues that Ockeghem “wants you to know that something is wrong with the end of the cantus firmus [in De plus en plus] and that he can fix it, but only with great difficulty.” While the Missa Caput is considerably less extreme in this regard, the underlying principle is the same: post-cadential extensions can be combined with other strategies to underline the compositional challenges posed by a modally wayward cantus firmus.

Ockeghem makes this modal disjunction particularly explicit in the extension at the end of the Patrem. Here, he essentially writes simultaneous cadences to G (the mode of the

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7 Sherr, “Thoughts on Ockeghem’s Missa De plus en plus,” 338.
cantus firmus) and D (the overall mode of the mass) before using the post-cadential extension to reassert the prominence of D-Dorian.

If we leave the discantus out of the picture, the cadential arrival in m. 95 is clearly to G. The altus and tenor form the requisite discantus-tenor framework with an under-third cadence, while the bassus fills out that framework by providing a final fifth. The sense of arrival on G is further heightened by the unusual imitation among the upper three voices in m. 92, which clearly projects a G-Mixolydian modality. In contrast, the discantus prepares a cadence to D, complete with suspension formula, but without harmonic support from the lower three voices. Ockeghem’s counterpoint is deliberately ambiguous here and can be
interpreted as suggesting simultaneous cadences to D and to G. Rather than concealing this modal disjunction by forcing the tenor to drop out before the final cadence, as is typical in this mass, Ockeghem seems to revel in it; indeed, the tenor firmly arrives on its final G at the same time as the superius arrives on d’.

The only way out of this modally tricky situation is through the post-cadential extension. The altus and bassus, which have just formed a cadence to G, rectify the situation by moving back to D; while the tenor moves up a fifth to articulate d twice, the altus moves to b before descending to a via the 6-5 motion common to extensions. The post-cadential extension, then, salvages the overall D-Dorian modality of the mass out of what appeared to be an irreparable modal conflict. Ockeghem’s focus on projecting the modal conflict between the cantus firmus and the other voices is no accident; Fabrice Fitch goes so far as to call the Missa Caput a “serious challenge to modal orthodoxy” that “strikes at the very heart of modal practice.”

8 Once more, Ockeghem uses the post-cadential extension as a vehicle for addressing issues of cantus firmus treatment that pervade the entire mass.

Post-cadential extensions can also engage with the model through allusion to its distinctive or memorable features, as is the case with the fragmentary Missa Fors seulement. As Tables 1 and 2 reveal, this mass contains five (perhaps six) extensions of the plagal type, more than any other mass; this observation is all the more striking because only three movements (Kyrie, Gloria, and Credo) survive. This large number of plagal extensions, all moving from D to A sonorities, reflects one of the most striking aspects of the mass’s model, Ockeghem’s haunting rondeau Fors seulement l’actente. Much about the chanson, including its voice ranges and tenor function, is unusual, but one of the most memorable passages comes at the medial cadence:

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The cadential arrival on A between discantus and tenor in m. 39 is interrupted by the deceptive motion of the contratenor to f, which then moves to a held D sonority with the discantus; then, the discantus and tenor gradually return to A via ornamental parallel tenths. This same plagal movement from D to A is present in six of the mass’s seven cadential extensions, which occur at the end of every section; additionally, some sort of initially deceptive resolution involving F is present in four of those six. The frequency of these types of extensions arguably represents a deliberate quotation from the medial cadence. Jaap van Bentham points out that Ockeghem takes care to align his quotations and allusions in the mass with the structure of the rondeau, especially in the Kyrie and Gloria; the post-cadential extensions play a similar role.9

One of the most complex extensions in the Missa Fors seulement occurs at the conclusion of the Gloria, in a passage that repays close analysis. Particularly noteworthy is the combination of extension formulae that normally appear separately:

9 See van Benthem, Johannes Ockeghem, vol. II, fasc. 4, xii–xiv..
Here, the quasi-cadential arrival on A between the tenor and bassus 1 (m. 135) is masked by the deceptive resolution of the discantus and bassus to F. Then, while the tenor holds its final note, the other three voices continue with typical extension formulae that combine to form a plagal cadence. The discantus ascends to a’ before descending by step to e’, displaying the common 8-5 pattern, while the first bassus simply ascends by third to c. The altus, with its repeated turns between f and e, seems to be playing with the 6-5 pattern, but at the very end rises from c to e in a static 3-5 ending. Finally, the second bassus creates the plagal motion with its ascent from D to A, but does so with a dotted rhythmic pattern more commonly associated with the 3-5 ascent. The complexity of this extension makes it challenging to parse but also indicates that it is exceptional; the unusual length and structure of the extensions in the Missa Fors seulement call for further study.

The medial cadence in Fors seulement l’actente leaves its mark on another of Ockeghem’s works: the five-voice motet Intemerata Dei mater. Intemerata shares a number of characteristics with the Missa Fors seulement: both have an unusually low bassus part that frequently descends to low D,10 and the plagal extensions that close all three sections of Intemerata combine several formulaic extension gestures in a similar way. In a more direct reference, Intemerata quotes the haunting opening melody of Fors seulement at the beginning of its secunda pars.11 The motet’s final extension mirrors the rondeau’s unusual medial cadence:

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While the discantus and tenor arrive at a Phyrgian cadence to E, the lower two voices move to a plagal A sonority before resolving into an open fifth (E-B). The contratenor, however, concludes with a florid melodic gesture strongly reminiscent of the discantus’s melody at the medial cadence of the chanson. Both lines soar upwards to the sixth degree above the final before descending in a distinctive 6-5-3 gesture. We have already seen that Intemerata engages with the melodic material of Fors seulement; in the drive to the final cadence, Ockeghem permeates the texture with repeated references to the chanson’s opening gesture. With this relationship in mind, it seems likely that the contratenor’s distinctive melodic gesture in the final extension of the motet is a direct reference to the extension at the medial cadence of the rondeau.

Just as post-cadential extensions speak to Ockeghem’s multifaceted engagement with pre-existing material, they also reveal his concern for long-term structural pacing within movements. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Missa Mi mi: a mass, like Fors seulement, with a plethora of plagal extensions. While these extensions reflect the contrapuntal challenges of creating conclusive final cadences in a Phrygian-mode work, they also play a vital role in determining musical pacing. The extension at the medial cadence of the Gloria is worth quoting in full:

12 For a discussion of the modal issues prevalent in the Phrygian mode, especially the tendency to write final cadences to A as well as E, see Ross W. Duffin, “Mi chiamano Mimi... but my Name is Quart Toni: Solmization and Ockeghem’s Famous Mass,” Early Music 29 (2001): 164–85, esp. 168–170, 173–74, and 176.
An extraordinary amount of rhythmic energy is built up by the syncopated dotted rhythms in the discantus in m. 57, and is released in the furious rhythmic activity of m. 58. The compression of the vocal range from a fifteenth (end of m. 56) to a single octave in m. 58 further heightens the dense effect of the semiminim-level syncopation in the discantus, tenor, and bassus. This rhythmic energy spills over into the cadence in m. 60, which is approached by vigorous minim movement; consequently, the post-cadential extension here becomes a sort of rhythmic brake, reining in the excess energy of the preceding material. The pervasive minim articulation of the previous bar gives way to semibreve articulation, with the harmonic rhythm slowing dramatically as well. The function of this rhythmic buffer becomes clear in the next section: in the Qui tollis, the mensuration changes to Cut-C, the rhythmic pulse slows to the semibreve, and all voices begin to move homorhythmically, a trend that culminates in the dramatic “suscipe” in mm. 85–95. Here, a post-cadential extension plays a vital role in the rhythmic pacing of a movement. By
dampening the energy of the “drive to the cadence” through rhythmic deceleration, it eases a critical transition to the slow homorhythm of the following section.

As determinants of rhythmic pacing, post-cadential extensions serve different structural functions at different points within a mass movement. The Missa Au travail suis, in which the same extension is used four times in different rhythmicizations, is particularly illuminating. While the extensions used at the medial and final cadences of the Credo are very similar, the differences are equally suggestive:

**Medial Cadence**

Both extensions contain the same pitch content: they ascend by step from the third above the final to the fifth, using the final itself as a springboard in between. But Ockeghem’s different rhythmicizations are revealing. At the medial cadence, he uses a syncopated rhythm that projects a sense of forward propulsion; the bassus drops out at the point of resolution before jumping in on a syncopated semibreve. At the final cadence, by contrast, the superius arrives at the point of resolution with the other voices and continues with a
straightforward rhythmicization of the extension that is completely lacking in syncopation. The rhythmic differences may seem subtle, but they illustrate a more important aspect of Ockeghem’s practice: extensions at medial cadences are typically more rhythmically complex, designed in a way that propels the music forward, while extensions at final cadences tend to be more rhythmically staid. Although the extensions may be similar in overall length and pitch content, Ockeghem varies the rhythmic drive to promote either a sense of forward movement or of finality.

The Credo of the Missa Fors seulement provides a prime example of this tendency. This movement includes two post-cadential extensions, one at the end of the Patrem, the other after the final Amen:

Medial Cadence:
Final Cadence:

The extension at the medial cadence is rhythmically active in a way that propels the singers into the ensuing Et resurrexit. As the discantus and first tenor arrive on a cadence to A, the other three voices continue toward an unusually florid plagal cadence. The ascending run in the bassus is particularly daring in its use of fusae and is immediately followed by semiminim-level syncopation; the dotted rhythms and fusae in the contratenor, second tenor, and bassus (compressed references to the opening motive of the chanson?) are equally striking. All of these features create a degree of rhythmic energy unparalleled in any of Ockeghem’s other post-cadential extensions; indeed, the extension at the end of the Credo is positively anemic by comparison. While of the same plagal type, it uses much larger note values; with the exception of a dotted semibreve–minim gesture in the superius, the voices move exclusively in breves. These differences underscore the contrasting structural functions of the two extensions. Medial extensions tend to make use of strikingly profiled gestures that build rhythmic momentum, propelling the music forward into the new section. By contrast, concluding extensions are far more rhythmically staid, drawing the music to a close by elongating the final cadential gesture.

Post-cadential extensions, then, are not necessarily the stock gestures that they may seem. Although some are certainly formulaic in nature, others are used in sophisticated ways that reflect their integration into the overall structure of a work. They may reflect issues of compositional planning, cantus firmus treatment, and a work’s relationship to its model, as we have seen in the masses De plus en plus, Caput, and Fors seulement;
extensions can also act as a means of smoothing out transitions by controlling rhythmic pacing, as we have seen in the Missa Mi mi. Furthermore, Ockeghem’s use of varied rhythmic devices to emphasize the difference between medial and final extensions suggests a sophisticated approach to pacing within movements that warrants further study. My findings suggest that post-cadential extensions can provide a wealth of insight into composers’ use of pre-existing material as well as the tricky matter of large-scale compositional planning. Several questions remain to be answered, both about Ockeghem’s use of post-cadential extensions and about their stylistic function in the Franco-Flemish repertory as a whole. Sean Gallagher has drawn suggestive parallels between syntax and style in his discussion of rhythmic patterns;¹³ how does Ockeghem’s use of extensions compare to the established “syntax” of his contemporaries, and what kind of stylistic conclusions can we draw from analyzing their music? For the listener, post-cadential extensions are literally “the last word” in a piece; for the scholar, they are an untapped source of stylistic information about cantus firmus treatment, musical pacing, and even questions of attribution. As such, they demand far more analytical attention than they have received so far.

Table I. Post-Cadential Extensions in Ockeghem’s Sacred Music (by type)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No. of occurrences</th>
<th>Caput</th>
<th>Ecce ancilla Domini</th>
<th>De plus en plus</th>
<th>L’homme armé</th>
<th>Au travail suis</th>
<th>Fors seulement (KGC only)</th>
<th>Mi Mi</th>
<th>Ma maistresse (KG only)</th>
<th>KGC a 5</th>
<th>Cuiusvis toni</th>
<th>Motets</th>
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<td>5</td>
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Table II. Extensions in Ockeghem’s Masses (by movement)

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</table>
Appendix

The Appendix provides musical examples to illustrate the six categories of cadential extensions. Since some extensions fit into multiple categories, I’ve selected what strikes me as the overall defining feature of each (for example, an extension containing multi-voice plagal movement as well as 3-5 movement in one voice has been placed in the plagal category).

I. **Rearticulating Cadential Pitch**: *Missa L’homme armé*, Agnus Dei III (altus)

![Musical Example](image)

II. **3-5 Movement**: *Missa De plus en plus*, Kyrie II (altus)

![Musical Example](image)

III. **6-5 Movement**: *Missa De plus en plus*, Agnus Dei III (altus)

![Musical Example](image)
IV. 8-5 Movement: Missa Ecce ancilla Domini, Sanctus (superius)

V. 3-1 Movement: Missa Mi mi, Qui tollis (bassus)

VI. Plagal–Phrygian Cadence: Missa Mi mi, Sanctus (altus and bassus)