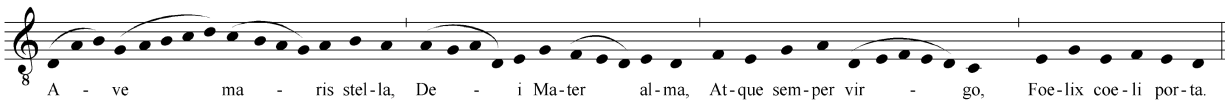


**“In the Flesh as Well as in Spirit”¹:
(Meta) Physical Embodiment in Monteverdi’s setting of “Ave Maris Stella” (1610)**

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In 1610 Monteverdi published his setting of the plainchant hymn, “Ave maris stella” as part of his massive *Vespro della Beata Vergine*. Based on the thirteenth-century hymn used for vespers on the feast days of the Virgin Mary and of other female saints, the words are in seven litany-like verses that open with praise for the Virgin Mary, implore for intercession in the central verses, and end with a doxological commendation of the Trinity (ex. 1 and 2).

Example 1. Monteverdi’s version of the plainchant “Ave maris stella”



Example 2. The text of “Ave maris stella”

- | | | |
|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Ave maris stella,
Dei mater alma,
atque semper Virgo,
felix coeli porta.</i> | Hail, star of the sea,
Mother of God,
and ever Virgin
joyful gate of heaven. |
| 2 | <i>Sumens illud Ave,
Gabrielis ore,
funda nos in pace,
mutans Evae nomen.</i> | Receiving that “Ave”
spoken by Gabriel
and reversing the name “Eva”
establish peace in our lives. |

¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan (Princeton, New Jersey, 1993) I, 82-83. “In Saint Elizabeth’s *Revelations* we read that once when the saint was rapt in ecstasy, she had a vision...Not long afterwards Elizabeth asked the angel with whom she frequently talked what the vision had meant. The angel answered: “You were shown how our Lady was assumed into heaven in the flesh as well as in spirit.”

3	<i>Solve vincia reis, profer lumen caecis, mala nostra pelle, bona cuncta posce,</i>	Loose the bonds of sin, bring light to the blind, destroy our wickedness, pray for all that is good.
4	<i>Monstra te esse matrem, sumat per te precem, qui pro nobis natus tulit esse tuus.</i>	Be a mother to us; let Him, who deigned for our sake to be born your son, hear our prayers through yours.
5	<i>Virgo singularis, inter omnes mitis, nos culpis solutos mites fac et castos.</i>	Most excellent and submissive of virgins, free us from sin, make us meek and spotless.
6	<i>Vitam praesta puram, iter para tutum, ut videntes Jesum semper collaetemur.</i>	Grant us a sinless life, prepare a safe journey for us, so that, at the sight of Jesus, we may rejoice eternally.
7	<i>Sit laus Deo Patri, summor Christus decus, Spiritu Sancto tribus honor unus. Amen.</i>	Praise be God the Father, glory to Christ the Lord, and to the Holy Spirit, the same honor to all three. Amen.

The hymn's unambiguous place in the liturgical order of the Vespers, as well as Monteverdi's apparently clear-cut setting of the plainchant, seem to create little room for critical comment, especially when compared with the more exotic flora of the rest of his "1610" Vespers pieces. Yet one striking element of this simple piece invites attention—its rhythmic structure. Monteverdi shapes the piece by setting the rhythmically unmeasured tune of the plainchant in a broad duple meter for the opening and closing verses of the hymn's musical frame, while the five interior verses and instrumental *ritornelli* are set in a dance-like triple meter (table 1).

Table 1. Monteverdi’s metrical design for “Ave maris stella”

Verse	Forces	Meter
Verse 1	Double Chorus:	Duple meter
Verse 2	<i>À 4</i> (First Chorus)	Triple meter
Instrumental Ritornello à 5		
Verse 3	<i>À 4</i> (Second Chorus)	
Instrumental Ritornello à 5		
Verse 4	<i>Ad una voce Soprano</i> (Cantus from First Chorus)	
Instrumental Ritornello à 5		
Verse 5	<i>Ad una voce soprano</i> (Sextus from Second Chorus)	
Instrumental Ritornello à 5		
Verse 6	<i>Tenore solo</i> (from First Chorus)	
Verse 7	<i>Sit laus à 8. Senza ritornello inanti.</i> (Both choruses without a ritornello before)	Duple meter

More specifically, Monteverdi shapes the opening and closing frame in a typical *stile antico* duple meter, while rhythmically embodying the middle verses of the plainchant in the triple-meter gestures of the galliard (a dance that historian Julia Sutton describes as “one of the most vigorous and showy dances of the Renaissance”). Why does Monteverdi introduce a secular dance into this setting, especially in contrast to the piece’s beginning and ending that are stylistically marked as “sacred”?

Focusing on this one compositional choice, in this presentation I suggest that in the “Ave maris stella” Monteverdi uses the unmeasured chant as a metaphor for Mary’s interior spirit. The melody then becomes incarnate through rhythm, and more importantly creates dual rhythmic “bodies” for the melody. These two contrasting temporalities musically fashion both spiritual and fleshly representations of Mary’s dual aspects as a human being existing in historical time; as well as, with her bodily assumption into heaven, a supernatural being outside of time. By

presenting the possible musical and theological sources behind Monteverdi's design, I hope to offer insight into the meaning of his "Ave maris stella" and early seventeenth-century Italian religious belief.

"Non sine corpore"

Mary's importance in Christianity, as well as in the Counter Reformation reaction to Protestantism, is complicated by a problem that theologians have grappled with since the days of early Christianity—her relative absence in scripture. Mary's significance in Christianity rose in the church father's need to differentiate Jesus from gods that were miraculously born, died and then resurrected in the syncretic Roman paganism of the late empire. Historian Marina Warner notes that Mary's "unbroken virginity suspended the law of nature, and thus manifested the presence of the divine, [while at the same time] her full parturition of Christ served to prove his manhood. The virgin birth was key to orthodox Christianity."²

Yet for all her centrality to Christological humanation, the New Testament remains surprisingly elliptical about Mary. The evangelist Luke has the most to write about her, including the story of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-36) and the Visitation (Luke 1:37-56) in his account. This absence in scripture did not stop Christian theologians—or the popular imagination—from speculating about Mary. In one of the avuncular passages from *The Golden Legend*, a medieval "bestseller" about the lives of saints, Jacobus de Voragine describes the supposed events on the day of Christ's resurrection.

Three other apparitions [by Jesus] are referred to as having happened on the day of the resurrection...The third apparition was to the Virgin Mary and is believed to have taken place before all the others, although the evangelists say nothing

² Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 64.

about it...Indeed, if this is not to be believed, on the ground that no evangelist testifies to it, we would have to conclude that Jesus never appeared to Mary after his resurrection because no gospel tells us where or when this happened. But perish the thought that such a son would fail to honor such a mother by being so negligent!...Christ must first of all made his mother happy over his resurrection, since she certainly grieved over his death more than the others. He would not have neglected his mother while he hastened to console others.³

And as St. Augustine puts it: “Since Scripture tells us nothing, we must seek by reason what accords the truth. Thus, truth itself becomes our authority, and without truth there is no valid authority.”⁴ Accordingly, with the approval of Augustine, theologians, mystics, and the common imagination continued to fill in the scriptural blanks about Mary. The Mary reflected in *The Golden Legend*'s stories is neither a historical Mary, nor is she the scripturally-based Mary that theology desires, but rather a Mary of common belief—a Mary of Augustine's “truth”.

Early Christianity's devaluing of the body, especially in the rather stern views of St. Jerome, are ultimately reflected in the seventeenth-century mind/body split of Descartes that marks modernity. Yet this view is a simplification of the both the secular and religious views shaping the early modern conception of the body and the psyche. Whereas the body might be nothing in Christianity, embodiment is everything. It is based on the belief that through Jesus' becoming human, suffering and dying on the cross, that humanity is saved. “In the beginning was the Word...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” as John intones at the beginning of his Gospel. And it is through Mary—her pregnancy and birth—that Jesus as *Logos* does become flesh. Taking stock of Early Modern Christian embodiment, Marina Warner writes

...Aquinas discussed at length the problem of identity, affirmed the uniqueness of each individual soul created by God at the moment of conception, but also

³ *The Golden Legend*, I, 221.

⁴ *The Golden Legend*, II, 95.

demonstrated that the soul's personality is expressed by and through the body. The implication of this teaching—that spirit could not exist without matter—was condemned after Aquinas' death; but the essential point—that the body and soul *together* form the individual—is fundamental to Christian doctrine.⁵

The New Testament mentions nothing about Mary's death or where she is buried. Given the importance of Mary's body to Christianity, it was only a matter of time before legends sprang up about her death. The first stories come out of the Middle East during early Christianity speak of Mary's Dormition [her homecoming]. The scene is usually depicted with Mary lying in bed as if asleep, surrounded by the apostles, and with Jesus coming down from heaven to receive her in death. In the story's transmittal to the West, however, Mary undergoes a transformation. Rather than her passive and silent death in the Dormition, she becomes an active participant. Mary dies, like Jesus, as proof of her humanity. But her soul is immediately returned to her body, and she is carried up bodily to heaven.

“A Drop of the Sea”: The Text

The text of “Ave maris stella” is often, but erroneously, attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and is also mentioned in *The Golden Legend*.⁶ Monteverdi does not react to the text as for a madrigal: the text is rather abstract and he cannot set it by matching its emotional affects. Indeed, the “text” already has a melody attached to it. Instead of using the whole of the plainchant as a *cantus firmus* for the piece's structure, Monteverdi's uses the chant as a tune, essentially limiting himself to a simple harmonization. Yet Monteverdi clearly does react to the

⁵ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 97.

⁶ *The Golden Legend*, I, 84. “Note that the star the Magi saw was a fivefold star... The fourth, the rational star, was the Blessed Virgin, whom they saw with the Child... the fourth in the hymn *Ave maris stella*...”

text—not in a word-by-word, or even clause-by-clause fashion—but to the hymn’s overall theme and reflects it broadly in his rhythmic choices.

1	<i>Ave maris stella, Dei mater alma, atque semper Virgo, felix coeli porta.</i>	Hail, star of the sea, Mother of God, and ever Virgin joyful gate of heaven.
2	<i>Sumens illud Ave, Gabrielis ore, funda nos in pace, mutans Evae nomen.</i>	Receiving that “Ave” spoken by Gabriel and reversing the name “Eva” establish peace in our lives.

The first verse hails Mary in her supernatural position as *Theotokos* (Mother of God), while the second verse shifts to speaks of Mary as a human being and at a moment of choice—her “mutation” of Eve’s fall into the “Ave” [“mutans Evae nomen”] at the Annunciation of the Messiah. This is when the dance music starts.

**“And she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her”:
Mary, Music, and Dance**

Monteverdi’s use of galliard rhythm in the middle verses of his setting derives first of all, I believe, from the traditional association between Mary, music and dancing. Mary is typically depicted surrounded by musicians and singers in many Renaissance paintings. The associations between Mary and music and dancing are not just artistic license, however, but have their roots in the very earliest writings about Mary. Marina Warner quotes from the apocryphal Book of James, relating that “When [Mary] is three years old, her parents fulfil [sic] their promise and

take her to the temple. The priest sits down on an altar step, but she is inspired: “And she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her” (*Book of James* 7:2).⁷

Mary’s role as the ark of the New Covenant, through carrying the Messiah, creates connections between her and the Ark of the Old Covenant and the dancing that surrounds it.

Made of “incorruptible timber,”...the Ark was lead by David into Jerusalem, where the priests sang and danced and clashed cymbals and played on harps and lyres to greet its coming, just as...[at the Assumption] Mary’s uncorrupted body is [similarly] conducted into heaven among a throng of exulting angels.⁸

Mary is further coupled with music in the tales about her Assumption, the moment of her death when, by Christian tradition, she is carried bodily into heaven. In a homily on the Assumption, St. Gerard describes the scene.

Today the heavens welcomed the Blessed Virgin joyfully, Angels rejoicing, Archangels jubilating, Thrones exalting, Dominations psalming, Principalities harmonizing, Powers lyring, Cherubim and Seraphim hymning and leading her to the supernatural tribunal of the divine majesty...[She] is attended by choirs of Angels, compassed about by troops of Archangels, accompanied on all sides by the jubilation of Thrones, encircled by the dances of Dominations, by the plaudits of Powers, by the honors of Virtues, the hymns of the Cherubim and the chants of the Seraphim. The ineffable Trinity also applauds her with unceasing dance, and the grace with which the three Persons totally infuse her draws the attention of all to her.⁹

Even the Trinity dances in the presence of the Virgin in this scene that sounds like a description of a Renaissance *intermedio*

⁷ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 26. Warner writes, “The east received the *Book of James* as authentic (it is extant in Greek, Ethiopic, and the oldest manuscript is in Syriac) but, surprisingly, it was not translated into Latin until the sixteenth century. In the west the *Book of James* and the *Gospel According to Thomas* were combined to form two apocryphal books: the *Gospel According to the Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Story of the Birth of Mary*. They were both written in Latin, probably as early as the eighth or ninth century, with prefaces purporting to be by St. Jerome.” 29-30

⁸ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 93.

⁹ *The Golden Legend*, II, 84-85,

“Mutans Eva”: Monteverdi’s *Mutanze*

In discussing how Monteverdi uses dance in his setting of “Ave maris stella” I want to return to the concept of mutation—“mutans Evae nomen”—mentioned in the text of the second verse of the hymn.

2	<i>Sumens illud Ave, Gabrielis ore, funda nos in pace, mutans Evae nomen.</i>	Receiving that “Ave” spoken by Gabriel and reversing the name “Eva” establish peace in our lives.
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Monteverdi employs the idea of mutation on multiple levels; Mary mutating the Fall into Salvation, the different versions of a tune as the two sides of Mary—as supernatural being addressed in the hymn’s opening verse and the human woman addressed by the angel Gabriel in the second verse—and more specifically, as a musical technique in the rhythmic mutation [*mutanze*] of melodies in dance.

The most common dance form in Renaissance Italian dance manuals is the *balletto*, a dance made up of a connected succession of two or more dance types, usually beginning with a slow duple-meter pavane and moving through one or more of a progression of increasingly faster triple-meter dance gestures (table 2).

Table 2. Two Types of Balletto progressions

1.	Pavane (2/2) and/or Brando (2/2)	Galliard (3/2)	
2.	Pavane (2/2) and/or Brando (2/2)	Galliard (3/2)	Sciolta (3/4)

While Julia Sutton refers to the *balletto* as a “balletto suite” because of its differing choreographic sections, the *balletto* musically is one intrinsic dance, and nothing like the

Baroque dance suite. Dance master Fabritio Caroso's *balletto*, "Celeste Giglio," from his 1600 dance manual, *Nobiltà di Dame*, is not a group of dances with separate tunes, but one dance (made up of different dance gestures to be sure) based on one tune that is put through a standard series of metrical variations, which I refer to as a "*balletto* progression." Caroso calls the metrical changes of these sections *mutanze* (variations or mutations).¹⁰ The tune of "Celeste Giglio" opens in a duple-meter pavane format (ex. 4a) that "mutates" to a triple-meter galliard, and then to a faster triple-meter *sciolta* (ex. 3 a-c).

Example 3. The Pavane (a), Galliarad (b), and Sciolta (c) in Caroso's "Celeste Giglio"



The *balletto* progression is one of increasing physicality, both in the actual dancing and in symbolic significance. While Italian dance masters do not discuss the symbolic affect of the individual dances, there are clues to their meaning.¹¹ In Thoinot Arbeau's earlier 1589 dance manual, the *Orchésographie*, he describes the pavane in categorical French fashion with the

¹⁰ Sutton, *Courtly Dance*, 34. For *mutanze* see Caroso's "Alta Gonzaga", "Altezza d'Amore", "Furioso all'Italiana" and other dances in M. Fabritio Caroso. *Nobiltà di Dame* (Venice: Presso il Muschio, 1600). Facsimile reprint, (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1970). Caroso also calls such sections "sonata" and "tempi".

¹¹ Julia Sutton notes in her introduction to *Nobiltà di Dame* that the "reason for the Italians' verbal neglect of the pavan from their manuals is obscure, but by 1581, the date of *Il Ballarino* [Caroso's first dance manual], the pavan was a least 75 years old. Its basic elements might very well have been taken for granted by then, and no need felt to characterize them, since everyone would know what they were and they were ubiquitous." 37.

interlinked associations of solemnity, nobility, and even divinity. In contrast, Arbeau writes that the vigorous galliard “is so called because one must be gay and nimble to dance it, and even when performed reasonably slowly, the movements are light-hearted.”¹² The first type of *balletto* progression accordingly can be seen to display and contrast the noble decorum of the pavane with the galliard’s physical display.

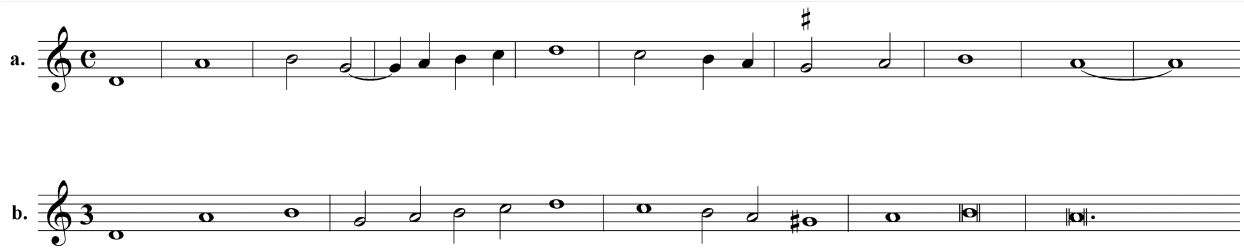
The term *sciolta* (“loosening”) in the section that can follow a galliard in the most typical *balletto* progression, is an even more physically vigorous type of dance derived from the *saltarello*. In one of Caroso’s dances, “Barriera Nuova,” he describes the physicality of the dance’s *sciolta* as a “folla,” a contemporary term for when tilts on horseback “runne pell mell altogether,” showing the third type of *balletto* progression as moving past the showy skill of the galliard into the melee of the *sciolta*.¹³ Physical yet respectable, the galliard functions as an intermediary between the boisterous *sciolta* and the solemn pavane, as Mary is intercessor between man and God.

Therefore, in creating the metrical shift from the first duple-meter verse of “Ave maris stella” to mutate to a galliard specifically, Monteverdi illustrates Mary’s transformation of “Eva into Ave,” of her humanity into divinity, with a musical technique clearly recognizable to the audience of the day (ex. 4).

¹² Arbeau. *Orchesography*, 78.

¹³ Sutton, *Courtly Dance*, n 218.

Example 4. Monteverdi's two rhythmic versions of "Ave maris stella"



Conclusion: *Sacra Conversazione* in Dance

Whereas Mary's physical humanity, her mutating of Eve, and her associations with music and dancing can shed light on Monteverdi's use of the *mutanza* idea in embodying the plainchant as a galliard, it still does not address the question concerning the duple-meter of the opening for the opening and closing verse from which, and to which, Monteverdi mutates the tune. Monteverdi's duple-meter setting of the plainchant in verse one and seven stretch the tune into metrical uncertainty as much as one can with such melodically distinct material. I suggest that in the *stile antico* opening of Monteverdi's setting, and its companionship and contrast with its following galliard setting, Monteverdi uses these contrasting rhythmic forms to create an dual representation of Mary as a supernatural being existing beyond time in the duple-meter setting of the melody, and Mary as a bodily human being through the rhythmic metaphor of the triple-meter galliard. The two time signatures and two temporalities represent Mary as "in" and "out" of time.

Recall that as a physical being outside time, Mary can appear not only in Spirit as a Vision, but in the body as an Apparition. Again Warner writes

Aquinas, and seers like Teresa [of Avila] herself, distinguished between an imaginary vision, which took place in the mind's eye but was nonetheless real for that, and an apparition, which, like Christ's appearance to the disciples after the Resurrection, was apprehensible to the eyes of the flesh...For in a vision heaven and earth collided in a piece of time and space and suspended both of them...while an apparition sanctified that portion of the terrestrial sphere where it took place with lasting salvific effect."¹⁴

Accordingly, Monteverdi fashions the Mary of "Ave Maris Stella" as both a vision and apparition in the rhythmic contrast and mutations of the plainchant melody. Monteverdi's Mary appears in a kind of musical vision, transforms into a tangible apparition, and back again into spirit at the end of the piece. This is a Mary that offers "salvific effect" to the performers and listeners. For while Mary is on one hand beyond time, her apparition in the form of a galliard "in time" offers the means of communication and intercession.

The deeper significance of the galliard may be that while Monteverdi uses the dance to embody Mary's humanity, it is also a dialogic dance. The typical galliard figure is the alternating interchange of dance variations between partners. The galliard then is—as with most Renaissance dances—a dialogue, a conversation. What Monteverdi creates in the "Ave Maris Stella" is a presence for the performers and audience to converse with. By doing so, Monteverdi gives aural form to the *sacra conversatione* theme developed in Renaissance paintings such as Titian's *Pala di Pesaro* (fig. 1), where the Virgin Mary, saints who lived in many different eras, and even the humble worshipper can interact in a space where the earthly boundaries of time do not exist.

¹⁴ Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 300-01



Figure 1: Titian, *Pala di Pesaro* (1519-1526), detail. Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.