

El grillo e bon cantore

Josquin des Prez



IOSQVINVS PRATENSIS.

Edited by Marianne Hund

El grillo e bon cantore



Josquin des Prez
c. 1450-1521

Superius
Altus
Tenor
Bassus

El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re, Che
El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re, Che
El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re, Che
El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re, Che

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S
A
T
B

tie-ne lon-go ver - - - so. Da-le bre-ve gril-lo can-ta,
tie-ne lon-go ver - - - so. Da-le bre-ve gril-lo can-ta,
tie-ne lon-go ver - - - so. Da-le bre-ve gril-lo can-ta,
tie-ne lon-go ver - - - so. Da-le bre-ve gril-lo can-ta,

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S
A
T
B

da-le, da-le, bre-ve, bre-ve, gril-lo, gril-lo can-ta. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can -
da-le, da-le, bre-ve, bre-ve, gril-lo, gril-lo can-ta. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can -
da-le, da-le, bre-ve, bre-ve, gril-lo, gril-lo can-ta. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can -
da-le, da-le, bre-ve, bre-ve, gril-lo, gril-lo can-ta. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can -

Source: O. Petrucci: Frottole Libro Tertio, Venezia, 1504.

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S to - re. Ma non fa co-mo gli al-tri o - cel - li, Co-me li han can-ta-to un po - co, Van de

A to - re. Ma non fa co-mo gli al-tri o - cel - li, Co-me li han can-ta-to un po - co, Van de

T to - re. Ma non fa co-mo gli al-tri o - cel - li, Co-me li han can-ta-to un po - co, Van de

B to - re. Ma non fa co-mo gli al-tri o - cel - li, Co-me li han can-ta-to un po - co, Van de

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S fat - to in al - tro lo - co, Sem - pre el gril - lo sta pur sal - do,

A fat - to in al - tro lo - co, Sem - pre el gril - lo sta pur sal - do,

T fat - to in al - tro lo - co, Sem - pre el gril - lo sta pur sal - do,

B fat - to in al - tro lo - co, Sem - pre el gril - lo sta pur sal - do,

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S quan - do la ma - gior è'l cal - do al - hor can - ta sol per a -

A quan - do la ma - gior è'l cal - do al - hor can - ta sol per a - mo -

T quan - do la ma - gior è'l cal - do al - hor can - ta sol per a -

B quan - do la ma - gior è'l cal - do al - hor can - ta sol per a -

38 *ossia*

S - - - mo - re. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re.

A re, a - - - mo - re. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re.

T - - - mo - re. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re.

B mo-re, a - - - mo - re. El gril - lo, el gril-lo è bon can - to - re.

In this edition I propose a few changes to the usual editions that will shed an entirely different light on Josquin's popular work. A full explanation is available in the scientific literature [1]. Here I summarise the main points.

- The word 'beve' (drink) does not make sense: crickets generally don't drink; they suck the juices out of plant material. It is more likely that the word 'breve' (brevis) was intended. Petrucci's typesetter probably overlooked the common abbreviation-sign of the letter r. The song talks about the contrast between the endless 'song' of the cricket (longo verso), symbolised by the long notes (the Longa's) in Superius and Bassus, and the short notes (the Breves) he sings it with (dalle breve grillo canta), symbolised by the staccato notes.

- The comparison with birds can be understood by the fact that the poet must have had in mind these big, noisy crickets in the Mediterranean regions, the cigales. Like birds they house in trees, but contrary to them don't move an inch all day (sta pur saldo). They 'sing' to allure a female to mate. This passage is set in a joyous ternary rhythm in order to mark the contrast between the melodious birdsong and the cricket's monotonous scratching. Notice that, in popular Italian the word 'grillo' has a second meaning: the male organ in an upright position. This of course gives a more 'piquant' twist to the song...

The edition given here is intended for practical use. Since the original edition might cause some confusion about the repeats, these were all written out. Unfortunately, the second part of Petrucci's original shows another editorial mistake: there is one semibreve too much in all four voices, which disturbs the dancelike rhythm. They were omitted in this edition. Contrary to 15/16th century notation, in modern notation the change to a ternary rhythm will be clearer when the mensuration-sign is changed.

Marianne Hund, 2025

Text and translation.

<i>El grillo è buon cantore</i>	<i>The cricket is a good singer</i>
Che tiene longo verso	(Although) he holds his song a long time
Dalle breve grillo canta	He sings it with short notes
<i>El grillo è bon cantore</i>	<i>The cricket is a good singer</i>
Ma non fa come gli altri ocelli	But he doesn't behave like the other birds
Come li han cantato un poco	Who, after they've sung a little,
Van de fatto in altro loco	Immediately move to another place.
Sempre el grillo sta pur saldo	The cricket always stays where he is.
Quando la magior è'l caldo	When the heat is at its greatest
Alhor canta sol: per amore	Then only he sings on: for love
<i>El grillo è bon cantore</i>	<i>The cricket is a good singer.</i>

1. Hund, Marianne (2006). "Fresh Light on Josquin Dascanio's Enigmatic "El Grillo"". *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*. **56** (1): 5–16. [JSTOR 20203933](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20203933)