



TRACES OF TOLLIUS

The Life and Work of the
Amersfoort Musician Joannes Tollius
(c. 1550-c. 1620)

Simon Groot

Escola harmonicis divinum Ecclesia cultum

Cornua multiplici vo

Traces of Tollius

For Louis

Professor Louis Peter Grijp served as the initial PhD supervisor in my quest for Tollius.

Because of complications around a steadily growing brain tumour he had to abandon his guidance in the final phase of my investigation. He died on January 9, 2016.

I will always remember, with great pleasure and gratitude, the moments in which he inspired me to broaden my horizons by letting me see through his exceptionally 'large frame of mind'.¹

¹ In Dutch: 'een groot denkraam', originally used by the dwarf Kwetal in the stories of Olivier B. Bommel, by Marten Toonder (1912-2005). Louis and I were both fans of the Bommel stories. Shortly before his death I told Louis that I would dedicate my dissertation to him, as well as the words I was planning to use. He was very fond of the 'large frame of mind' that I awarded him as well as the choice of these words.

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Joannes Tollius (c. 1550-c. 1620)

SIMON GROOT

Translation: Colin Woodward and Tim Braithwaite



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PREFACE

In 1995 I founded the *Hemony Ensemble* in Amersfoort to focus on the performance of Dutch Renaissance music. Shortly afterwards I discovered that Amersfoort had produced such a sixteenth-century composer: Joannes Tollius. The performance of three of his motets further aroused my interest in this musician. Together with the then city archivist Fred van Kan I collected microfilms of all traceable sources with works by Tollius. I began the transcription of these works, which, after completion, I performed with both the professional *Hemony Ensemble* and the amateur *Collegium Amisfurtense*. Attempts to find information about Tollius in the Amersfoort archives proved unsuccessful, and I was forced to rely on the sparse biographical information about him in modern musicological literature for the contents of my programme notes.

In 2009 I visited the Italian cities of Rieti and Assisi, the places of Tollius's first musical positions after Amersfoort. In the city archives I sought to verify the details of Tollius's life there. This yielded more than I had expected. A year later I visited the *Archivio di Stato* in Rome. This research produced so much new material that a revision of Tollius's biography seemed justified. In 2011, I decided to dedicate my doctoral thesis to Tollius, and the present book is the result. In 2017 I received my PhD from Utrecht University on the Dutch version of this text.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Louis Grijp, Dr Eric Jas and Prof. Karl Kügle of Utrecht University and Prof. Henk van Nierop of the University of Amsterdam for their help and support. In addition, I owe a great debt of gratitude to countless people who have helped me read and interpret the archival documents. For their help with the transcription of the often almost illegible Dutch texts, I would like to thank the employees of Archief Eemland, in particular Ton Reichgelt and Dick van Wageningen. Prof. Hans Smit, who always unreservedly let me share in the results of his own research into Amersfoort society in the period around the Reformation, also deserves my sincere gratitude. For his help in transcribing the Italian archival texts, I thank Attilio Bottegal, and Letizia Pellegrini at the University of Macerata. In the translation of the Italian and Latin texts I have been assisted by Esther Kronenburg, Jan van der Velden and Jan Bloemendal. For my research in Assisi I am especially grateful to Margherita Sensi. My special thanks go to Colin Woodward, who translated my Dutch and corrected my English, and to Tim Braithwaite, who has thoroughly rechecked and revised everything.

It is impossible to name all the people who have been important to me, but I am grateful to all those who have contributed in any way to the study of the life and work of Tollius.

I would like to end by thanking my wife Astrid and our daughters Xanne and Dieuwke. For many years, they have let me devote much of my time to researching Tollius. Often our holiday destination was determined by the fact that I wanted to visit an archive or library in the area, and they have always accepted this in good spirits.

Simon Groot

Amersfoort, autumn 2019

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge about the life of Joannes Tollius has, until now, been limited. The lemmata in musical encyclopaedia¹ tell us that he was, in all probability, born around 1550 in Amersfoort, and that – according to his own testimony – he was appointed musical director of the Chapel of Our Lady in his native town at an early age. Furthermore, it was known that, in 1583, he was appointed choirmaster at Rieti cathedral, and assumed the same position in Assisi a year later. One year later, he seemed to have found himself in some sort of trouble, but the details remained obscure. Tollius subsequently disappeared from the scene until 1587, when he submitted testimony in Rome regarding a French coachman. In 1588, he was rehabilitated by the Bishop of Padua (it was unclear why, but supposedly because of the aforementioned unknown problems in Assisi) and became a singer in the Episcopal Chapel of Padua, where he was thought to have remained until around 1600. From late 1601 until early 1603, he was an exceptionally well-paid singer at the court of Christian IV in Copenhagen. He was believed to have died in or shortly after 1603.

All music by Joannes Tollius which has survived was printed in the last decade of the sixteenth century.² As interest in the music of the Renaissance waned throughout the course of the seventeenth century, the music of Tollius also faded into oblivion. While Rudolf Tollius, brother of Joannes and a physician by profession, was included in the 1693 book *Rerum Amorfotiarum scriptores duo inediti*,³ the composer remained unmentioned.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, a renewed interest in the history of Dutch music arose in the Netherlands. After the Belgian Revolt and the withdrawal of the Belgians from the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1830, a need was felt for national heroes who could strengthen the sense of solidarity within the new nation state.⁴ The search focused on people from the early days of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, the so-called Golden Age.⁵ In

1 Lemmata on Tollius can be found in *Biographisch-bibliographisches Quellen-Lexicon der Christlichen Zeitrechnung bis zur Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* von Rob. Eitner (1903-); *Hugo Riemanns Musik-Lexikon* (1905-); *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1928-); *Enciclopedia della musica* (Milano 1963-1964), part 4, pp. 395-396; *Padova e la sua provincia* (Padova 1965); *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik* (1966-) and *Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti* (Turin 1989), Le Biografie, part 8, p. 57.

2 See Appendix VII for a short overview of these sources and Appendix VIII for a bibliographical description.

3 Verhoeven/Matthaeus 1693, p. 59. This book about the history of Amersfoort names a number of important citizens of the town.

4 See Rietbergen/Verschaffel 2006, pp. 8-9 and Judo/van de Perre 2006, *passim*.

5 Rietbergen/Verschaffel 2006, p. 194.

addition to naval heroes such as Piet Hein, Maarten Tromp and Michiel de Ruyter, writers such as Vondel, Hooft and Bredero, and painters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer, attention was also paid to musicians. The music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1561/62-1621), then already considered to have been the greatest musician the Netherlands had ever produced, occupied the centre of interest from the very beginning.⁶ Researchers combed libraries and archives in search of surviving sources of music and information about the lives of Sweelinck and his contemporaries. It was during this period that the music of Tollius emerged once again, alongside that of Sweelinck. In 1869 Jan Pieter Heije – secretary of the Central Committee of the ‘Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst’ (MBT, Society for the Promotion of Musical Arts) and chairman and founder of the ‘Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis’ (now the KVNMM, the Royal Society for Music History of The Netherlands) – set the ball rolling.⁷ All Heije had access to at the time was a single partbook from Tollius’s *Madrigali a sei voci*, located in the library of the MBT.⁸ However, within the space of a few decades, all the currently known works of Tollius had been rediscovered. An important role in this process was played by the German musicologist Robert Eitner, who came into close contact with Heije. Eitner arranged, for example, for transcriptions of some of Tollius’s five-part motets to be made.⁹ In his preface to these transcriptions (dated Berlin, April 1874) Eitner is very enthusiastic about these motets, while praising Tollius as an innovator. His admiration is mainly focused on the harmonic proficiency of Tollius and his ‘skilful boldness’ in this respect. Eitner wrote: ‘Tollius belongs to the innovators, he is not content to limit himself to the old means, but looks for harmonic innovations [...]. Who would expect to find such sophisticated harmonic structures used with so much taste in the sixteenth century?’¹⁰

After Heije’s death in 1876, the baton passed to music historian J.C. Boers, member of the VNM, violinist, composer, and collector of musical instruments. In an article in the first (1885) issue of the *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* (TVNM, the Journal of the Society for Music History of The Netherlands) he provided additional information about Tollius’s stay in Padua, as well as details about his presence as choirmaster in Assisi and the testimony he made in Rome in 1587.¹¹ He also quoted an excerpt from a letter from Puteanus in which he sends greetings to Tollius.¹²

6 Dodt van Flensburg 1840, passim; Kist 1842, passim (see also: Groot 2012 and Groot 2018 about the rediscovery of Sweelinck’s music in the nineteenth century).

7 Heije 1869a, passim and Heije 1869b, passim.

8 The purchase of this partbook is mentioned by J.P. Heije in *Geschiedenis en Handelingen van de Maatschappij tot Bevordering der Toonkunst* No. 8, XXXVIde Algemeen Verslag, 24 October, 1865 (see also Chapter 5, pp. 118-120). It remains in the ‘Toonkunst collection’ (since 2008 part of the department Special Collections of the University Library in Amsterdam) and has shelf number TK: 206-F-10.

9 These transcriptions are still present in the ‘Toonkunst collection’, University Library of Amsterdam, with shelf number TK: Ms-Tol-1 (transcription of the partbooks of the cantus of both the two issues with five-part motets from 1591) and TK: Ms-Tol-2 (transcription in score with piano reduction of the first ten motets of both issues).

10 Eitner 1874: ‘Tollius gehört unter die Neuerer, er lässt es sich nicht genügen, mit den alten Mitteln auszukommen und Haus zu halten, sondern sucht nach harmonischen Neuerungen [...]. Wer vermuthet wohl im 16. Jahrhundert solche harmonische Kühnheiten mit so viel Geschick verwendet’.

11 Boers 1885, on the basis of Bertolotti 1880. Boers misspells the name of the author as ‘Bertelotis’ and incorrectly gives 1860 as the year of its publication.

12 Boers 1885, p. 45. Erycius Puteanus (1574-1646) was a Dutch scholar working in Padua during the same period as Tollius (see also pp. 75, 81-82 and 90-92; for the letter of Puteanus, see Appendix I, item 39).

In 1892 Angul Hammerich's monograph *Musiken ved Christian den Fjerdtes Hof* appeared in Copenhagen.¹³ A year later, Catharinus Elling produced a German translation.¹⁴ The following year an article by Julius Röntgen based on the same publication appeared in *TVNM*, with the cooperation of the original author, under the title 'De muziek aan het hof van Christiaan IV van Denemarken' (The Music at the court of Christian IV of Denmark).¹⁵ These texts are important for our understanding of Tollius's life because they established for the first time that he had been active as a singer at the Danish court between November 10, 1601, and January 18, 1603.¹⁶

In 1901 Max Seiffert published the six-part madrigals of Tollius as publication nr. XXIV of the MBT/VNM.¹⁷ The brief preface provides a clear overview of Tollius's biography, as far as it was known around the turn of the twentieth century. At the same time, Seiffert published a much more detailed article in *TVNM*.¹⁸ Seiffert was the first to couple the Christian name 'Jan' to the surname 'Tollius', but this combination is not to be found in any contemporary source. Where the surname is written in Latin, it is always linked to 'Joannes'; the first name 'Jan' only appears in sources with the Dutch surname 'Tol' (with all possible spellings, like Tol, Toll, Thol, Tholl, all with or without the insertion 'van'). I have therefore chosen to ignore the hybrid 'Jan Tollius' and to use 'Joannes Tollius' when referring to the composer, and 'Jan (van) Tol' when dealing with his childhood.

The reissue of Tollius's madrigals in 1901 led to regular performances of his music both in the Netherlands and abroad over the ensuing decades. Ensembles such as Anton Averkamp's *Klein Koor a Cappella*, Sem Dresden's *Madrigaal-Vereeniging*, and Hubert Cuypers's *Schola Cantorum* included his music in their regular repertoire – as can be seen in concert announcements and reviews in Dutch newspapers.¹⁹ That the reissue itself was directly responsible for this renaissance of Tollius's music in performance is clear from the fact that these performances consisted only of those madrigals reissued in 1901. The concert programmes almost always comprised a combination of old Dutch masters from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as contemporary composers. It seems that contemporary reviewers made little to no distinction between the music of Tollius and that of other Dutch composers from the period in question. Some examples: 'And what a wealth of colour and expression in the madrigal by Or. di Lasso, what a fine charm in Tollius's pastoral work!'; 'I mention in particular the eternally beautiful motets by de Près (*Ave Maria*) and those already mentioned by Verdi (sic), the choral pieces by Tollius, Lemlin, Costeley and le Jeune'; 'The golden era of North-Netherlands' schools was represented by Obrecht, Sweelinck and Tollius'; 'They began with some specimens of the old-Nether-

13 Hammerich 1892; Tollius is discussed on p. 26.

14 Elling 1893.

15 Röntgen 1894.

16 Hammerich 1892, p. 220, nr. 53. In the article in *TVNM* (Röntgen 1894) the date of Tollius's entrance into service was incorrectly given as October 10, 1611. While the faulty year has not been repeated, the wrong month has frequently been used in articles since then. My recent archival research has made clear that November 10, 1601 is correct (RAK, Regnskaber 1559-1660, *Rentemesterregnskaber*, Udgiftsbilag til rentemesterregnskabet, No. 259: D.c. Hoffet m.m. 1601, f. 133^v, see Appendix I, item 41).

17 Seiffert 1901. See Appendix VII for an overview of the editions of Tollius's works.

18 Seiffert 1904.

19 The bibliography provides a chronological overview of newspaper articles about Tollius.

lands' choral music – beautiful motets, psalms and witty chansons by Obrecht, Tollius and Sweelinck – a rich and aristocratic art from the Golden Age of Netherlands' music'.²⁰ In addition, Tollius's music was heard once again in his hometown. During the 'Muziekfeest en Kunstenaars-Concert' – organised by the Amersfoort department of the MBT on Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 June, 1903 – Sunday afternoon's performance began with two madrigals by Tollius.²¹

Not everyone valued Tollius's music, as became clear in 1929, when Dr. J. C. Hol devoted an article in *NRC* (a Dutch daily newspaper) to Cypriaan de Rore. Following an extensive debate about the causes of Rore's obscurity he wrote: 'Unfortunately, we prefer to reprint the completely irrelevant, entirely derivative Italianate madrigals of Tollius (a musical Bernard van Orley) and even, very misguidedly, to sing them abroad'.²² Dr. J.C. Hol, son of composer and conductor Richard Hol, was a musicologist and apparently championed the work of De Rore. His negative view on Tollius's work was not shared by others; at least no similar reactions have surfaced. Overall Tollius was equated with Sweelinck, Schuyt and Waelrant, composers with whom he often shared a concert programme. There is, in these reviews, a clearly observable tendency, in which the works of the old masters are given more positive comments than those of modern composers (of whom only Diepenbrock receives consistently positive reviews). The period between Sweelinck and Diepenbrock is either disparaged or, more often, completely ignored.²³

After the publication of the edition of Tollius's madrigals and the article on his life by Seiffert in 1901, no new research was published in the Netherlands for several decades. In Italy, however, a few studies about the cathedral choirs where Tollius worked appeared in the 1940-1942 issues of *Note d'Archivio per la Storia Musicale*, which added new details on the life of Tollius. In a series of articles about the Rieti cathedral choir Angelo Sacchetti-Sassetti – himself from Rieti and at the time known as a historian and philologist – is the first to describe the appointment of Tollius in Rieti.²⁴ He writes that on July 2, 1583, Tollius

20 Original texts and sources: 'En welk een kleurweelde en expressie in het madrigaal van Orl. di Lasso, welk een fijne bekooring in Tollius' pastoraal werkje!' (November 27, 1917, *Algemeen Handelsblad*); 'ik noem daarvan in het bijzonder de onvergankelijk-schoone motetten van de Près (*Ave Maria*) en het reeds genoemde van Verdi, de koortjes van Tollius, Lemlin, Costeley en le Jeune' (January 20, 1920, *Algemeen Handelsblad*); 'De gouden tijd der Noord-Nederlandsche scholen werd vertegenwoordigd door Obrecht, Sweelinck en Tollius' (June 12, 1937, *De Waag*); 'Begonnen werd met enkele specimina van de oud-Nederlandsche koor muziek – prachtige motetten, psalmen en geestige chansons van Obrecht, Tollius en Sweelinck – een rijke en aristocratische kunst uit den bloeitijd der Nederlandsche toonkunst' (July 10, 1937, *Sumatra Post*).

21 www.kranten.kb.nl: *Het nieuws van den dag*: kleine courant of June 16, 1903.

22 Hol 1929. Original text: 'Helaas, wij geven er de voorkeur aan de volkomen irrelevante, want geheel onzelfstandig Italianiseerende madrigalen van Tollius ('n muzikale Bernard van Orley) opnieuw te drukken en die zeer te onpas zelfs in den vreemde te komen zingen.' Bernard van Orley (c. 1490-1541) was a Flemish painter; nowadays he is considered important, but because of the absence of recent monographs about his life and works he has not been given sufficient attention; apparently in the authors opinion also Orley did not deserve fresh attention.

23 In *NRC* of May 10, 1920 there is mention of 'the flowering of Dutch music in the 15th and 16th centuries and the inexplicable decay in the centuries that followed'; 'In the Netherlands, music has known a few hundred humiliating years'; 'for about two hundred and fifty years, therefore, nothing was written in our country that is still worth the trouble of listening to'. *De Waag*: algemeen cultureel, politiek en economisch weekblad voor Nederland (a newspaper which, incidentally, was open about its sympathies for the Nazi regime) of June 12, 1937 commented: 'there is of course an element of unfairness, to compare contemporary composers with the masters from the heyday after so many centuries of a lack of tradition.'

24 Sacchetti-Sassetti 1940 and Sacchetti-Sassetti 1941.

was appointed choirmaster of the cathedral with the normal conditions [what these normal conditions were is not explained in this text] and for a tenure of one year, and that Rinaldo del Mel was his successor.²⁵ Another series of articles in the same magazine concerns Padua cathedral. Raffaele Casimiri, the chief editor of the magazine, contributed the article *Musica e Musicisti nella Cattedrale di Padova nei sec. XIV, XV, XVI*.²⁶ In Chapter 7, *Avvenimenti e notizie*, some new details about Tollius's stay in Padua are brought to light, which would in turn be picked up by Dutch researchers.²⁷

In 1949 Charles van den Borren, a Belgian musicologist and a pioneer of the historical interpretation of early repertoire, published a book on the history of Dutch music in which he also paid attention to Tollius.²⁸ He compared Tollius's madrigal *Zefiro torna* with the madrigal on the same text by Claudio Monteverdi and concluded that the latter was inspired by Tollius.²⁹

In the second half of the twentieth century Frits Noske, professor of musicology at the University of Amsterdam and librarian of the Toonkunst Library, was central in contributing to our knowledge of the life and work of Tollius. His thesis *La melodie française de Berlioz à Duparc*, defended at the University of Amsterdam on October 19, 1954, included the following proposition: 'The chromaticism in the five-part motets by Joannes Tollius (1591) distinguishes itself essentially through its harmonic functional sense from works by Cypriaan de Rore, Orlandus Lassus, Luca Marenzio and Gesualdo da Venosa'.³⁰ During a meeting of the International Musicological Society in 1958, Noske gave a lecture on Tollius, the text of which was included in the proceedings of the conference under the title *Joannes Tollius, ein Niederländischer Meister des Frühbarock*.³¹

Noske was also the first to refer to Tollius's solitary Dutch song included in the *Modulitrium vocum*.³² Van den Borren failed to mention it in his 'Het Nederlands polyphoon lied',³³ and neither was it noted in René Lenaerts's 1933 monograph *Het Nederlands Polifonies Lied in de Zestiende Eeuw*.³⁴ However, in 1983 Noske dedicated an entire article to this Dutch motet entitled 'Een driestemmig Nederlands kerstlied van Joannes Tollius (1597)'.³⁵ Jan Willem Bonda also discussed it in his dissertation *De meerstemmige Nederlandse liederen van de vijftiende en zestiende eeuw*.³⁶

25 Sacchetti-Sasseti 1940, p. 141; the date is in fact September 2, 1583, as also becomes clear from the reference Sacchetti-Sasseti himself gives to Doc. XXXI, Sacchetti-Sasseti 1941, p. 70.

26 Casimiri 1941 and Casimiri 1942.

27 Casimiri 1941, pp. 139-140.

28 Van den Borren 1949.

29 Van den Borren 1949, pp. 371-373. This statement will be discussed in Part II.

30 Noske 1954.

31 Noske 1959a.

32 Noske 1959a.

33 Van den Borren 1949, pp. 376-392.

34 Lenaerts 1933.

35 Noske 1983.

36 Bonda 1996, pp. 61 and 214.



Photo: Monique Kooijmans.

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Joannes Tollius (c. 1550-c. 1620) was born in Amersfoort and began his career as music director of the Amersfoort Chapel of Our Lady. He flourished in Italy as *maestro di capella* of the cathedrals of Rieti (1583-1584) and Assisi (1584-1586), and as *cantor tenorista* in Rome (1586-1588) and Padua (1588-1601). He ended his career as an exceptionally well-paid singer in the court chapel of Christian IV in Copenhagen (1601-1603). In 1590, a collection of three-part motets appeared under the surprising title *Motecta de dignitate et moribus sacerdotum* (motets about the dignity and morals of priests), presumably intended as a denunciation of the priests who had had him imprisoned in Assisi on charge of heresy, a charge of which Tollius was later acquitted. In 1591, two collections of five-part motets appeared in quick succession. In these motets, Tollius uses techniques of word painting that go significantly further than those used by his contemporaries in sacred music. In 1597, an extended and revised reprint appeared of the 1590 three-part motets, now under the title *Moduli trium vocum*, together with a collection of six-part madrigals. In his madrigals, Tollius shows himself to be a skilled composer who is in keeping with the madrigal output of his Italian contemporaries. In 1598, two new madrigals by Tollius appeared in collections of works by Paduan masters, including such great names as Lodovico Viadana and Costanzo Porta. Tollius is unconventional in his compositions. He combines works with an archaic character, with works that fit in prevailing compositional trends, but he also experiments with means that go far beyond what his contemporaries allowed themselves. His oeuvre may be small, but its diversity and quality makes it notable. During his life, Tollius regularly came into conflict with his employers. He was often fined and sometimes even imprisoned. Contemporary accounts of Tollius are contradictory when it comes to his personality, but they are unanimous in recognising that he was a skilled musician.



Cover illustration: Engraving by Adriaen Collaert, after a design of Jan van der Straet (detail), included in Joannes Bochius, *Encomium Musices* (Philips Galle, Antwerpen c. 1590). Rijksmuseum Amsterdam