

The Genius Palestrina –

Romantic Tendencies and Rhetoric in the Restorative Church Movement of 19th Century Munich

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Or

How Franz Xaver Witt and the *Cäcilienverein* in Munich tried to distance church music from the romantic genius cult and ended up creating their own Beethoven.

Historical Context

Decentralized culture outside of the church's influence

Religious reverence of romantic composers

Secularisation and de-institutionalisation

- Pressure to legitimize and validate the church's importance
- Desire to distance from the blasphemous tendencies of romantic musical reception
- Fear for the sanctity of the Holy Catholic Church

Returning to the "Good Old Days"

Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina –
The symbol of the movement

- Renaissance composer who allegedly "saved" polyphonic church music
- Untouchable and historically enshrined in the church as an institution
- His musical style provided a clear structure to legitimize modern church music

Findings

The mission of developing a new church music tradition **failed**. All efforts to separate ended in **discourse stalemates**. Arbitrary systems to classify musicians failed to hold up against reality and held no claim outside of the glorified past.

The younger the composer, the harder it was to anchor them fully to the church. This led to the **exclusion** of renowned church musicians like Haydn.

There has always been a church music tradition that had once developed into Palestrina and then away from him. Recreating a tradition is **redundant**.

The approach of Witt and his *Cäcilienverein* is ironically in agreement with the **romantic zeitgeist**. The metaphors used to describe Palestrina and the concept of "New Palestrinas" are comparable to the rhetoric of the Beethoven cult.