

A RENAISSANCE CHRISTMAS

*Renaissance choral masterpieces for
Advent and Christmas*

| Iken Scholars
| *Matthew Dunn*

Saturday 4 December

7.30pm

All Saints' Blackheath

L O N D O N

MMXXI

A RENAISSANCE CHRISTMAS

Nesciens Mater *Jean Mouton (1459-1522)*

Alma redemptoris mater *Tomás Luis de Victoria (c.1548-1611)*

Magnificat sexti toni *Victoria*

Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria *John Sheppard (1515-1558)*

I N T E R V A L

Descendit angelus *Victoria*

O magnum mysterium *Giovanni P. da Palestrina (1525-94)*

Missa *O magnum mysterium* *Palestrina*

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus et Benedictus

Agnus Dei

IKEN SCHOLARS

Director
Matthew Dunn

Sopranos
Jenny Forsyth
Emily Field
Jennie Lambert
Katharina Dunn
Nerissa Taysom
Louisa Dawes

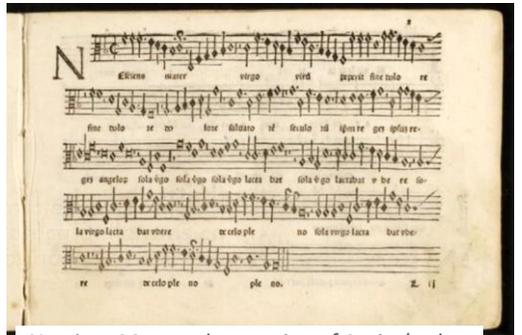
Altos
Jess Dagers
Marion Harris
Rowan Cope
Jess Ballantine

Tenors
John Robb
Tom Norrington

Basses
Maxime Rischard
Joachim Sabbat
William Hess
Tom Brockington

PROGRAMME NOTES

In 1520, Andrea Antico needed to establish himself as the new kid on the block. Already successful in Rome, the young printer had shut up shop and headed to Venice, enticed by the broader commercial opportunities available there. Andrea saw himself as a craftsman:



Nesciens Mater - the opening of Antico's altus partbook

preferring the old technique of double-impression wood blocking to create his extremely refined music publications. It was slow and laborious work, but the outputs in the hands of a skilled artisan were undoubtedly finer than the comparatively 'low market' moveable type preferred by Petrucci, his great rival.

But he still needed something that would attract the attention of the music-buying community in Venice and further afield.

He opted for an anthology format to get the ball rolling, and he pulled together a collection of pieces he hoped would enable him to make his mark: the *Motette et carmina gallica* was born. At its head he placed a superb new piece by the fashionable composer Mouton: *Nesciens mater*.

This is where we begin tonight in our exploration of some of the finest compositions of the High Renaissance devoted to Advent and Christmas.

* * *

Occasionally the world produces a musician of such genius that it makes your head begin to steam. Bach is a good example. There is an organ piece I occasionally play (*Aus tiefer Not* BWV686) that is a six-voiced fugue where the two bottom lines are both taken by the feet; where these two lines are a canon of each other with the right foot playing five notes higher and twice as slowly as the left; and after all that the right foot turns out to

be playing the Lutheran Chorale all along. By rights it shouldn't be possible.

Mouton is another. His stunningly beautiful motet ***Nesciens mater*** is a quadruple canon between two choirs, with the second choir singing four notes higher and two measured later than the first. Again, it shouldn't be possible: but there it is. And it stands at the head of a long line of what we now call Franco-Flemish composers who constructed mind-boggling games with canons running backwards and forwards, with parts starting at different pitches, singing at different speeds and with different rhythms.

But for all this fun and games, the question remains: why this technique for this piece specifically? I believe the answer is in the text. Because this text drives at the paradox at the heart of the Christmas message: how can the Creator become created? How can the King of Angels be quietly cared for in a stable in Bethlehem?

In Mouton's hands the 'low song' of earth (choir two) and the 'high song' of heaven (choir one two measures later) are identical and yet do not share a single note. What's more, they become intertwined in a way that not only enhances and completes the other, but only *works* in one possible combination and resolution. I cannot think of a more challenging or theologically 'deep' New Song in the entire canon of Western Art Music.

This is deep stuff and you didn't come here for a sermon, but this is what you get in an age of priest composers: Mouton was a priest, Victoria was a priest and Palestrina very nearly became a

priest (come to our Palestrina concert in spring to find out what happened there!).

Let's move on. Our next two pieces represent the pinnacle of



Sant'Apollinare, where Victoria was maestro at the time of the 1581 publications

Victoria's achievements. His double choir ***Alma redemptoris mater*** motet was first published in 1581 when Victoria was still working in Rome. It was reprinted five times before his death: a testament to its enduring popularity. It is the Marion antiphon from Advent to Christmas Eve. The double-choir format, first explored by Willaert in Venice a few decades earlier,

was growing in popularity by the 1580s. It was already eight years after Victoria's first double choir piece (his *Ave Maria* in the 1572 *Motecta*), and you can see Victoria's mastery of the form developing. Watch out for how Victoria plays the two choirs off one another with increasing rapidity until the spine-chilling moment they combine forces in full eight-voice sonority.

If the effect is impressive with eight voices, then the **Magnificat sexti toni** goes even further. This three-choir setting is the largest-format work Victoria ever penned and, indeed, is only exceeded by the monster-sized works of Gabrielli, Striggio and Tallis' one-off *Spem in alium*. Of course, the magnificat is the Song of Mary at the Annunciation and in Victoria's day was, as in ours, sung daily in the evening office of Vespers.

This particular setting is a compositional *tour de force* for Victoria, written when he had retired to Madrid to be the *maestro* for the Dowager Empress Maria of Spain.

We finish this first half with our only English offering this evening: Sheppard's huge responsory **Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria**. Sheppard is a particularly interesting Tudor composer as he was active under three monarchs: Edward, Mary and Elizabeth. Each had dramatically different requirements of their composers and Sheppard's output mirrors this. Tonight's piece comes from the middle period under Mary, when England was once again Roman Catholic. This ushered in a hugely productive period of beautiful, large-scale compositions in Latin. Perhaps the most extreme of these is the sublime *Media vita*, which, at half an hour, is longer than most Classical symphonies. *Gaude Maria* is half that length, but like the *Media vita* is a responsory and so has the special form where the text folds in on itself repeatedly, forming a potentially infinite structure.

* * *

John the Baptist plays a significant role in our Advent preparations. The gospel accounts of the angel announcing John's

conception to his father Zechariah in the temple at Jerusalem form a counterbalance to Gabriel's' message to Mary. (As, by the way, does Zechariah's response to the angel's message in comparison to Mary's.) The first piece in the second half of tonight's programme, ***Descendit angelus***, describes in almost pictorial terms the descent of the angel to Zechariah and the announcing of the boy's name. Listen out for the stunning contrast between the intricate polyphony at the start of the piece and the homophonically declamatory 'Iohannes Baptista'.

The rest of our concert tonight is given over to Palestrina's motet ***O magnum mysterium*** and the associated **parody mass**, which is built on the same musical material as the motet. In some ways, we are back to where we started: for this responsory for Christmas Day is a meditation on the intertwining of heaven and earth: 'O great mystery... that animals should see the new-born Lord!' Palestrina employs a restrained five-voice scoring for the piece, but breaks the associations between voices constantly, thus creating new 'choirs' every few measures. Is it too much to imagine that Palestrina is also suggesting the divide between heaven and earth has been permanently broken by the Christmas message?

MJD

TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS

Nesciens mater, Mouton

Nesciens mater virgo virum
peperit sine dolore
salvatorem saeculorum.
Ipsam regem angelorum
sola virgo lactabat,
ubere de caelo pleno.

Knowing no man, the Virgin mother
bore, without pain,
the Saviour of the world.
Him, the king of angels,
only the Virgin suckled,
breasts filled by heaven.

Alma redemptoris mater, Victoria

Alma Redemptoris Mater,
quae pervia caeli porta manes,
et stella maris,
succurre cadenti surgere
qui curat populo:
Tu quae genuisti,
natura mirante, tuum sanctum
Genitorem:
Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis
ab ore sumens illud Ave,
peccatorum miserere.

Loving Mother of the Redeemer,
who remains the gate by which
we mortals enter heaven,
and star of the sea,
help your fallen people
who strive to rise:
You who gave birth,
amazing nature, to your sacred Creator:
Virgin prior and following,
taking from the mouth of Gabriel
that Hail! have mercy on our sins.

Magnificat, Victoria

Magnificat, anima mea, Dominum
et exultavit spiritus meus
in Deo, salutari meo.
Quia respexit
humilitatem ancillae suae:
ecce enim ex hoc beatam
me dicent omnes generationes.
Quia fecit mihi magna,
qui potens est,
et sanctum nomen eius,
et misericordia eius a progenie
in progenies timentibus eum.
Fecit potentiam in brachio suo,
dispersit superbos

My soul doth magnify the Lord:
and my spirit hath rejoiced
in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded:
the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold, from henceforth:
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty
hath magnified me:
and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him:
throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm:
he hath scattered the proud

mente cordis sui.
Deposuit potentes
de sede
et exaltavit humiles;
esurientes implevit bonis
et divites dimisit inanes.
Suscepit Israel puerum suum
recordatus misericordiæ suæ,
sicut locutus est ad patres nostros,
Abraham et semini eius in sæcula.
Gloria Patri, et Filio,
et Spiritui Sancto:
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc,
et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum.
Amen.

Gaude Maria, Sheppard

Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria virgo,
cunctas haereses sola interemisti,
quae Gabrielis Archangeli
dictis credidisti:
Dum virgo
Deum et hominem genuisti
et post partum
virgo inviolata permansisti.

Gabrielem Archangelum
scimus divinitus te esse affatum:
uterum tuum de Spiritu Sancto
credimus impregnatum:
erubescat Judaeus infelix,
qui dicit Christum
ex Joseph semine esse natum.

Dum virgo
Deum et hominem genuisti
et post partum
virgo inviolata intergra
et casta es Maria

Quae es effecta
fulgida coeli porta
O Mater alma Christi carissima

in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from
their seat:
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things:
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy
hath holpen his servant Israel:
as he promised to our forefathers,
Abraham and his seed, for ever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
I | As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice virgin Mary,
you alone banished all heresies,
who believed the words
of the archangel Gabriel:
While still a virgin,
you bore both God and man
and after birth
remained an inviolate virgin.

We know that the archangel Gabriel
addressed you with divine prophecy:
and we believe that your womb
was impregnated by the Holy Spirit.
Let the wretched Jew blush
who says that Christ
was born of the seed of Joseph.

While still a virgin,
you bore both God and man
and after birth,
you are an inviolate virgin, uncorrupted
and chaste, Mary.

You who was made
the shining door of heaven,
O loving, dearest mother of Christ,

Suscipe laudum
pia preconia
Nosta ut pura pectora
sint et corpora
Quae nunc flagitant
devota voxque et corda
Tu da per
precata dulcissima
Nobis perpetua frui vita
O benigna quae sola inviolata
permansisti

receive the pious prayers
of our praises,
that our hearts and bodies
may be pure,
which things devoted voices
and hearts now demand.
Grant to us through
sweet-sounding prayers
that we may enjoy perpetual life.
O kind lady who alone
remained inviolate.

Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Ghost.

et post partum virgo inviolata
permansisti.

and after birth you remained
an inviolate virgin.

INTERVAL

Descendit angelus, Victoria
Descendit angelus Domini
ad Zachariam dicens
accipe puerum in senectute tua:
et habebit nomen Ioannes Baptista.

The angel of the Lord appeared
to Zacharias, saying:
accept a boy in your old age:
and he will have the name John the Baptist.

Ne timeas quoniam
exaudita est oratio tua,
et Elisabeth
uxor tua pariet tibi filium:
et habebit nomen Ioannes Baptista.

Do not fear,
for your prayer has been heard,
and your wife Elizabeth
will bear you a son:
and he will have the name John the Baptist.

O magnum mysterium, Palestrina
O magnum mysterium
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia
viderent Dominum natum
jacentem in praesepeio.

O great mystery
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals
should see the new-born Lord
lying in a manger!

O beata Virgo,
cujus viscera meruerunt
portare Dominum Jesum Christum.

Ave Maria, gratia plena:
Dominus tecum.
O beata Virgo,
cujus viscera meruerunt
portare
Dominum Jesum Christum.
Alleluia!

Missa 'O magnum mysterium',

Palestrina

Kyrie

Kyrie eleison;
Christe eleison;
Kyrie eleison.

Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo
et in terra pax hominibus
bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te; benedicimus te;
adoramus te; glorificamus te;
gratias agimus tibi propter
magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite,
Jesu Christe,
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,
Filius Patris,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis;
qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus Sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus Altissimus,

O blessed is the Virgin,
whose womb
was worthy to bear Christ the Lord.

Hail Mary, full of grace:
the Lord is with you.
Blessed is the Virgin
whose womb
was worthy to bear
Christ the Lord.
Alleluia!

Lord, have mercy;
Christ, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.

Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to men of
good will.
We praise you; we bless you;
we worship you; we glorify you;
We give thanks to you for your
great glory.
O Lord God, Heavenly King,
God the almighty Father.
O Lord Jesus Christ,
only begotten Son.
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father,
You take away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us;
You take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
You who sit at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy upon us.
For you alone are holy,
you alone are the Lord,
You only are the most high,

Jesu Christe,
cum Sancto Spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Credo

Credo in unum Deum;
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem caeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium
et invisibilium.

I believe in one God;
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible
and invisible.

Et in unum Dominum
Jesum Christum,
Filiū Dei unigenitum,
et ex Patre natum
ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero,
Genitum non factum,
consubstantialem
Patri:
per quem omnia facta sunt.
Qui propter nos homines,
et propter nostram salutem
descendit de caelis.
Et incarnatus est
de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria Virgine:
et homo factus est.
Crucifixus etiam pro nobis,
sub Pontio Pilato,
passus et sepultus est.
Et resurrexit tertia die
secundum Scripturas:
et ascendit in caelum.
Sedet ad dexteram
Patris:
et iterum venturus est cum gloria,
judicare vivos et mortuos:
cujus regni non erit finis.

And in one Lord
Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father
before all worlds.
God of God, light of light,
true God of true God,
begotten not made,
being of one substance
with the Father:
by Whom all things were made.
Who for us men,
and for our salvation
descended from heaven.
And was incarnate
by the Holy Ghost
of the Virgin Mary:
and was made man.
He was crucified also for us,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
died and was buried.
And on the third day He rose again
according to the Scriptures:
and ascended into heaven.
He sits at the right hand
of the Father:
and He shall come again with glory,
to judge the living and the dead:
and His kingdom shall have no end.

Et in Spiritum Sanctum,

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

Dominum, et vivificantem:
qui ex Patre
Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre
et Filio simul
adoratur et conglorificatur:
qui locutus est per Prophetas.

the Lord, and giver of life:
Who proceeds from the Father
and the Son.
Who with the Father
and the Son together
is worshipped and glorified:
as it was told by the Prophets.

Credo in unam sanctam catholicam
et apostolicam Ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et expecto
resurrectionem mortuorum
et vitam venturi sæculi.
Amen.

And I believe in one holy catholic
and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism
for the remission of sins.
And I await
the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Sanctus
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth;
pleni sunt caeli et terra
gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts;
heaven and earth are full of
your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Blessed is He who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest

Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei,
qui tollis
peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lamb of God,
you who take away
the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis
peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Lamb of God,
you who take away
the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis
peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God,
you who take away
the sins of the world,
grant us peace.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

*** All TBC at the moment as venues get back up to speed – Join our mailing list to keep up to date! ***

Lassus in the Bavarian Court

A concert exploring Lassus' stunning output during his long tenure under Albrecht V of Bavaria, who deliberately cultivated a court to rival those in Italy. From drinking songs to the grandest Mass settings, we'll investigate why Lassus in his day what reputed to outshine even the great Palestrina.

Music for a New World

The Spanish conquest of Central Mexico in the early sixteenth-century is one of the defining moments of the early modern period. An hundred years on and Puebla (south of Mexico City) has a grand new cathedral, and the expertise and funds to instigate a musical tradition to rival its European counterparts. In this concert we will examine the music that was exported to Puebla and indeed the superb output of the Pueblan composer José Padilla Sánchez. But at what cost?

A lifetime achievement award: the Missa 'Cantantibus'

In the closing years of Palestrina's life (d.1594), seven composers (including Palestrina) collaborated to compose the huge triple-choir Missa 'Cantantibus': a joint tribute to S Cecilia and Palestrina himself. In this concert we will be performing this rarely-heard and virtuosic Mass, and investigate the output of all seven composers who contributed to this most unusual project.

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