In principio erat verbum

Josquin Desprez (1455-1521)
Plainchant
Costanzo Festa (1485-1545)
Anon. 13th century
Jacobus Clemens non Papa (1510-1555)
Josquin Desprez
Plainchant
Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594)
Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

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Robert White (1530-1574)
Jehan Lhéritier (1480-1552)
Plainchant
Tomás Luis de Victoria
Cristóbal de Morales (1500-1553)
Tomás Luis de Victoria
Plainchant
Josquin Desprez
Hieronymus Vinders (1500-1560)

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The Art of Music

directed by
Mick Swithinbank

Église St-Alphonse,
Luxembourg
Sunday, 9 October 2016

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Marita Thomas & Nigel Heavey, alto
Mick Swithinbank, tenor
Alan Carlisle, baritone
Boris Adlam & Edward Seymour, bass

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A note on the programme

Much of the music in this programme is devoted to the Virgin Mary, while the related subjects of the Incarnation and Jesus’s birth and death are also touched upon. The exceptions appear in Part Two in the form of four psalm settings and a lament on the death of Josquin, of which there was something of a proliferation, many examples bringing out the best in their composers. A sub-theme of this concert, however, is the availability of a second baritone, making it possible to sing in up to eight parts and therefore also to include music for two choirs (Festa, Palestrina, the three works by Victoria), as well as a work requiring more men’s voices than usual (Lhéritier). Top of the bill are Josquin and Victoria, with three works each, and these composers were indeed key figures of the very separate periods in which they lived.

In principio erat verbum is a very characteristic Josquin work, alternating duets between different pairs of voices – or sometimes trios – with full sections, sober counterpoint with plain chords, and duple time with triple: all useful devices for generating variety in a long work. Another feature typical of Josquin’s style is that a duet between high voices is often repeated an octave lower by the other voices. The work is a setting of the first 14 verses of St John’s Gospel, a somewhat unusual choice of text, and a long one, which is delivered fairly syllabically and in a transparent texture which makes the text readily comprehensible.

Much music by Costanzo Festa (and indeed Josquin too) is to be found in the Vatican music manuscripts of the early 16th century, and this includes Festa’s setting of Inviolata, integra et casta es, which appears in a choirbook in the Sistine Chapel. Alexander Blachly comments on the repertoire from which it comes: ‘Papal music from the early 16th century reflects the same aesthetic spirit as that manifested in Michelangelo’s art: the choir-books abound in large-scale works for 5, 6 and 8 voices, which bear witness to a sensibility that glorified lavishness and grandeur. The composers of these works intended their music to reflect the glory of heaven itself, or to ensure that the music sung in the presence of the Pope would match or exceed in splendour that sung anywhere else in the world.’

The work is scored for two four-part choirs and employs fourfold canons throughout, meaning that all four voice parts are repeated at a different pitch shortly after they are first sung, with at least an overlap between the two sets of voices. This is most obvious in the first of the three sections, as the answering voices sing a whole octave higher than the initial ones. In the succeeding sections, the interval between the two groups of voices is reduced to a fifth and then a fourth. The third section is the most complex, in that the overlap between the groups of voices is
very close, and for much of the time both
choirs are singing simultaneously, while
the four canons are rigorously maintained.

A very medieval feature of the short work
Iam nubes / Iam novum is its use of
three different texts simultaneously.
Evidently, intelligibility to the listener
was not a prime concern. The two main
voices sing similarly structured texts
about the birth of Christ to Mary, linked
by just one phrase of text that they have in
common – Iam oritur Maria (now Mary
dawns) – while the third voice repeats a
brief, rhythmicised, plainchant phrase, to
the single word ‘solum’ (the sun), by way
of a cantus firmus. At the time when this
music was written, each of the upper
voices was required to harmonise with the
cantus firmus, but less attention was paid
to whether these two added voices always
harmonised with each other.

It was commonplace to set love poetry
from the Old Testament Song of Songs in
honour of the Virgin Mary, although one
may suspect that these texts were also
enjoyed simply for their own sake. A
setting such as Ego flos campi by
Clemens, for only three voices, was
perhaps in any case intended more for the
pleasure of amateur singers singing
recreationally than for church use. The
same composer’s fine setting of this text
for seven voices, which has twice figured
in Art of Music concerts, would surely
have been sung in church.

Josquin’s Ecce tu pulchra es sets another
Song of Songs text, with great tenderness.
In this case, the text is a dialogue between
the Old Testament lovers. This motet was
accorded a very prominent place in its
original published source, where it
appeared at the end of a book of Josquin
Masses. Its exact liturgical purpose, if
any, is not clear: according to Christian
doctrine of the time, the dialogue was
interpreted as between Christ and his
church, although the composition may also
have had a Marian purpose.

Palestrina’s Stabat mater appears to have
been a late work, dating from around
1590, and to have been written for the
Pope. After the composer’s death, the first
section continued to be performed
annually on Palm Sunday. As was the
case for Allegri’s famous Miserere, the
choir of the Sistine Chapel did not allow
any copies of the music to escape to the
outside world, until in 1770 the English
music historian Dr Burney managed to
obtain one, enabling it to be published in
London the following year. It is scored for
two choirs, often singing in alternation,
and at climaxes singing together. It
contains none of the placid counterpoint
which characterises much of Palestrina’s
music, but instead is chordal and
rhythmic, with much switching between
groups of two and three notes, creating
lively syncopation. The syllabic writing
was appropriate to the Counter-
Reformation, enabling the text to be heard
clearly, and also made it possible to sing a
long text in a fairly short time.
Victoria was one of the masters of the Counter-Reformation period, and accordingly adopted a somewhat more chordal style, with less extreme use of counterpoint, than earlier composers. Palestrina was an influence on him, but there is a case for considering Victoria’s music rather more expressive and intense. Although much of his finest music was written for mournful occasions (funerals, Passiontide), his contemporaries found his music ‘leaning towards the joyful’. This is certainly exemplified by Alma redemptoris mater: imprecations such as ‘have mercy’ have rarely sounded so confident of being heard. This work, and probably the others by him, were composed during his period as a young man working in Rome, before his return to Spain.

In writing for two choirs, Victoria adopted a widespread practice of constituting one choir of higher voices than the other, but with some overlap between the two. In Palestrina’s Stabat mater, on the other hand, two equal choirs are used.

The Anglican psalm-motet was a convenient compromise between the preferences of the Catholic and Protestant camps, because the texts were in Latin but the words taken from the Bible. Robert White, who was a keen practitioner of the genre, set Domine quis habitabit three times, our performance being of his third setting. He uses three pairs of equal voices – trebles, tenors and basses – and weaves a texture of imitative polyphony with them. Vidi speciosam adapts texts from the Song of Songs and elsewhere for use at Assumption.

Praeter rerum seriem: the cantus firmus, which will be heard first, is a vital feature. The text is a sequence assigned variously to the Assumption, the Annunciation and Christmas: it is about the virgin birth and the incarnation. The cantus firmus moves about between the top voice and one of the low ones, and also changes rhythmically: at first it is heard in very long note values (all the melodic interest being confined to the parts that Josquin composes against it), but later it is in a quick dancing rhythm, and eventually it is absorbed into the counterpoint.

The lament O mors inevitabilis by Hieronymus Vinders is typical of its genre in that it has a specially written text concerning the individual composer who has died (in this case certainly a heartfelt one, but by an unidentified poet) and combines that with a paraphrase of the Requiem aeternam chant - complete with its words - as a cantus firmus. Josquin’s famous Nymphes des bois, lamenting the death of Ockeghem, had shared these characteristics too. Vinders, clearly a Flemish composer, is known to have served briefly as a choirmaster in Ghent but is otherwise obscure, and hardly any music by him has survived. It would have been a pity to have lost this lament, however.

—MS
In principio erat Verbum,
Et Verbum erat apud Deum,
et Deus erat Verbum.
Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.
Omnia per ipsum facta sunt,
et sine ipso factum est nihil
quod factum est.

In ipso vita erat
Et vita erat lux hominum,
et lux in tenebris lucet,
et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.

Fuit homo missus a Deo,
cui nomen erat Johannes.
Hic venit in testimonium,
ut testimonium perhiberet de lumine:
ut omnes crederent per illum.
Non erat ille lux, sed ut
testimonium perhiberet de lumine.
Erat lux vera, quae illuminat omnem
hominem venientem in hunc mundum.
In mundo erat,
et mundus per ipsum factus est,
et mundus eum non cognovit.
In propria venit,
et sui eum non receperunt.
Quotquot autem receperunt eum,
dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri
his qui credunt in nomine eius.
Qui non ex sanguinibus,
neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex
voluntate viri: sed ex Deo nati sunt.

Et verbum caro factum est,
et habitavit in nobis:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
It was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made
that has been made.

In him was life,
and that life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God,
whose name was John.
He came as a witness
to testify concerning that light,
so that through him all might believe.
He himself was not the light; he came only as
a witness to the light.
The true light that gives light to everyone
coming into the world.
He was in the world,
and though the world was made through him,
the world did not recognise him.
He came to that which was his own,
but his own did not receive him.
Yet to all who did receive him,
to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God –
children born not of natural descent,
nor of human decision nor of the will of a man,
but born of God.

The Word became flesh
and dwelt among us,
et vidimus gloriam eius, 
gloriam quasi unigeniti a Patre, 
plenum gratiae et veritatis.

and we have seen his glory, 
the glory as of the Father’s only son, 
full of grace and truth.

Nesciens mater

Nesciens mater virgo virum peperit 
sine dolore salvatorem seculorum. 
Ipsum regem angelorum sola virgo lactabat, 
ubera de celo plena.

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.

Inviolata, integra et casta es a8

Inviolata, integra et casta es Maria: 
quae es effecta fulgida caeli porta. 
O Mater alma Christi carissima: 
suscie pia laudum praecoonia. 
Nostra ut pura pectora sint et corpora 
quaeg flagitant devote corda et ora: 
tua per precata dulciosa: 
nobis concedas veniam per saecula. 
O benigna! O Regina! O Maria! 
Quae sola inviolata permansisti.

O Mary, inviolate, whole and chaste, 
you are the shining gate of heaven. 
O kind mother, dearest to Christ, 
accept our faithful hymns of praise. 
That our souls and bodies may be pure, 
our devout hearts and mouths now entreat. 
Through your prayers’ sweet sounds 
grant us forgiveness for ever. 
O kindly one, O Queen, O Mary, 
you alone remain inviolate.

Iam nubes / Iam novum a3

Iam novum sidus oritur 
Iam Pater galaxia 
Iam ex Judea nascitur 
Iam orientur Maria 
Iam nobis celum panditur 
Iam det nobis gaudia 
In celi curia, 
Christus, cuius filia es mater et Maria. 

1st voice: Now a new star dawns, 
now the Father among the stars 
is born now from the tribe of Judah. 
Now Mary dawns. 
Now Heaven is thrown open to us. 
Now may Christ give us joy 
in the courts of heaven: 
Christ, for whom Mary is daughter and mother.

Iam nubes dissolvitur 
Iam Pater galaxia 
Iam flos ex spina rumpitur 
Iam orientur Maria 
Iam verum lumen cernitur 
Iam demonstratur via 
Iam pro nobis pia exoret Maria 
Ut fruamur gloria.

2nd voice: Now the cloud dissolves, 
now the Father among the stars 
now breaks forth as flower from the thorn. 
Now Mary dawns. 
Now the true light is seen. 
Now the path is shown to us. 
Now may loving Mary pray for us, 
that we may enjoy glory.

Solem.

3rd voice: The sun.
Ego flos campi a3

Ego flos campi et lilium convallium.  
Sicut lilium inter spinas,  
sic amica mea inter filias.  
Sicut malus inter ligna silvarum,  
sic dilectus meus inter filios.

Ecce tu pulchra es a4

Ecce tu pulchra es, amica mea.  
Oculi tuae columbarum.

Victimae paschali

Victimae paschali laudes  
immolent Christiani.  
Agnus redemit oves:  
Christus innocens Patri  
Reconciliavit peccatores.  
Mors et vita duello confluxere mirando,  
Dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus.  
Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti in via?  
Sepulcrum Christi viventis,  
Et gloriavidi resurgentes:  
Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes.  
Surrexit Christus spes mea:  
Praecedit suos in Galilaeam.  
Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere:  
Tu nobis, victor Rex, miserere.

Song of Songs, 2:1-3

I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley.  
‘As a lily among thorn bushes,  
so is my dear one among the maidens.’  
‘As an apple tree among other trees in a wood,  
so is my beloved among the young men.’

Bridegroom: Behold, thou art fair, my love;  
behold, thou hast doves’ eyes.

Bride: Behold, thou art fair, my love, and charming.  
Our bed is flowery.  
The beams of our house are cedar,  
and our rafters of cypress.  
I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

Bridegroom: As a lily among thorns,  
so is my love among the young women.

Bride: The king brought me into his chamber,  
he ruled me with love.  
Stay me with flowers, comfort me with apples,  
for I am sick with love.

To the Paschal victim let Christians  
offer up their songs of praise.  
The Lamb has redeemed the sheep:  
Christ who is without sin  
has reconciled sinners to the Father.  
Death and life have fought a huge battle,  
the Prince of Life was dead, but lives and reigns.  
Tell us, Mary, what did you see on your way?  
‘The tomb of Christ, who is alive,  
and I saw the glory of his rising;  
angels as witnesses, the shroud and linen cloth.  
Christ my hope has risen:  
He has gone to Galilee ahead of his people.’

Truly, we know Christ has risen from the dead:  
O King and victor, have mercy on us.
Stabat Mater a8

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594)
Marian, Passiontide

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Iuxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius
Cuius animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater unigeniti!
Quae maerebat et dolebat,
et tremebat dum videbat
Nati poenas incliti.

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Christi Matrem si videret
In tanto supplicio?
Quis non posset contristari,
Piam matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis
Iesum vidit in tormentis
Et flagellis subditum.
Vidit suum dulcem natum
Morientem desolatum
Dum emisit spiritum.

Eya Mater, fons amoris
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lugeam.
Fac, ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum
Ut sibi complaceam.

Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas,
Cordi meo valide.
Tui nati vulnerati
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Poenas mecum divide.

The mother stood there
sorrowing by the cross, weeping
while her son hung there;
her soul, lamenting,
sorrowing and grieving,
was pierced by the sword.

O how sad and afflicted
was that blessed mother
of her only-begotten son,
who wept and grieved
and trembled to behold
the torment of her glorious child.

Who would not weep
if he saw the mother of Christ
in such torment?
Who could not be sorrowful
to behold the pious mother
grieving with her son?

For the sins of his people,
she saw Jesus in torment
and subjected to the whip.
She saw her sweet son
dying, forsaken,
as he gave up the spirit.

Ah mother, fount of love,
let me feel the force of grief,
that I may sorrow with you.
Make my heart burn
with the love of Christ, the God,
that I may be pleasing unto Him.

Holy Mother! pierce me through;
in my heart each wound renew
of my Saviour crucified.
Let me share with you His pain,
who for all my sins was slain,
who for me in torments died.
Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixo condolore,
Donec ego vivero.
Juxta cruce tecum stare
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.

Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi jam non sis amara,
Fac me tecum plangere.
Fac, ut portem Christi mortem
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolere.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Cruce fac inebriari,
Et cruore Filii.
Inflammatus et accensus
Per te Virgo sim defensus
In die judicii.

Fac me cruce custodiri
Morte Christi praemuniri
Confoveri gratia.
Quando corpus morietur,
Fac, ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria. Amen.

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

Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)
Marian

Loving mother of the Redeemer,
who remains our gate to 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 before and after,
taking from the mouth of Gabriel that greeting,
have mercy on our sins.

Interval of about 12 minutes
Domine quis habitabit

Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo aut quis requiescat in monte sancto tuo?
Qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur justitiam.
Qui loquitur veritatem in corde suo: qui non egit dolum in lingua sua, nec fecit proximo suo malum: et opprobrium non accepit adversus proximos suos.

Ad nihilum deductus est in conspectu eius malignus, timentes Dominum glorificat.
Qui jurat proximo suo et no decipit, qui pecuniam suam non dedit ad usuram et munera super innocentes non accepit.
Qui facit haec non movebitur in aeternum.

Repleatur os meum

Repleatur os meum laude tua, alleluya, ut possim cantare, alleluya; gaudebunt labia mea, alleluya, dum cantavero tibi, alleluya.
In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in eternum.
In iustitia tua libera me et eripe me dum cantavero tibi, alleluya.

Exsurge, Domine

Ut quid Deus repulisti in finem: iratus est furor tuus super oves pasucae tuae?
Memor esto congregations tuae, quam possedisti ab initio.
Redemisti virgam hereditatis tuae: mons Sion, in quo habitasti in eo.
Leva manus tuas in superbias eorum in finem: quanta malignatus est inimicus in sancto!
Et gloriati sunt qui oderunt te: in medio solemnitatis tuae.

Robert White (1530-1574)—Psalm 15

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
Those whose walk is blameless
who do what is righteous,
who speak the truth from their hearts:
who have no slander on their tongues,
who do their neighbours no wrong,
who cast no slur
on their neighbours;

who despise those
whose ways are vile
but honour whoever fears the Lord;
who keep their oaths even when it hurts;
who lend money to the poor without interest
and do not accept bribes against the innocent.
Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

Jehan Lhéritier (1480-1552)—Psalm 70

Let my mouth be filled with thy praise, alleluya, that I may sing, alleluia.
My lips shall rejoice, alleluia,
when I sing to thee, alleluia.
In Thee, O Lord, have I put my trust, let me never be put to confusion:
but free me and deliver me in thy righteousness
when I sing to thee, alleluia.

Plainchant—Psalm 73 with Maundy Thursday antiphon

Antiphon: Arise, Lord, and defend my cause.

Psalm: O God, why hast thou cast us off unto the end: why is thy wrath enkindled against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed from the beginning.
The sceptre of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed: mount Sion in which thou hast dwelt.
Lift up thy hands against their pride unto the end; see what things the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary.
And they that hate thee have made their boasts, in the midst of thy solemnity.
They have set up their ensigns for signs, and they knew not both in the going out and on the highest top.

**Super flumina Babylonis**

*Tomás Luis de Victoria—Psalm 136*

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered you, O Zion. On the willows in the midst of them we hung up our instruments, for they that led us away captive asked us about the words of our songs and hymns: ‘Sing us some of the songs of Zion’. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

**Candida virginitas**

*Cristóbal de Morales (1500-1553)—Assumption*

Shining virginity, beloved dweller in Paradise, blossoming garden enclosed, meadow decked with flowers by whose merit the whole world celebrates the tidings. May she who was found worthy to give birth to her Lord, the virgin in flower, restore us to her son: she by whose merit the whole world celebrates the tidings.

**Vidi speciosam**

*Tomás Luis de Victoria—Assumption*

I saw the fair one rising like a dove above the streams of water: whose priceless fragrance clung to her garments. And as on a spring day, she was surrounded by roses and lily-of-the-valley. Who is this who rises from the desert like a pillar of smoke, laden with the perfumes of myrrh and frankincense? And as on a spring day, she was surrounded by roses and lilies-of-the-valley.
Præter rerum seriem

Præter rerum seriem:
parit Deum hominem virgo mater.
nec vir tangit virginem
nec prolis originem novit pater.
Virtus sancti spiritus opus illud
cœlitus operatur.
Initus et exitus partus tui penitus
quis scrutatur?
Dei providentia quæ disposit omnia
tam suave.
Tua puerperia transfer in mysteria.
Mater ave.

Josquin Desprez—Incarnation

This is no normal scheme of things:
God and man is born of a virgin mother.
She has known no man;
the child’s origin is unknown to the father.
By the Holy Spirit’s power this heavenly work
has been brought about.
The beginning and end of your giving birth
who can really know?
By God’s grace, which orders all things
so smoothly,
your childbearing confronts us with a mystery.
Hail, Mother.

O mors inevitabilis

O mors inevitabilis, mors amara, mors
cruelis, Josquin de Pres dum necasti,
illum nobis abstulisti, qui
suam per armoniam illustravit ecclesiam,
propterea, tu musice, dic:
requiescat in pace.

Hieronymus Vinders (1500-1560)
Lament on the death of Josquin Desprez

O ineluctable death, bitter death,
cruel death, when you killed Josquin Desprez,
you took from us a man who,
through his music, adorned the church.
And therefore, O musician, say:
May he rest in peace.

Requiem aeternam dona ei Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat ei.

Cantus firmus: Give him eternal rest, O Lord,
and may light eternal shine upon him.

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Our concert in March 2017 will comprise music for Lent and Passiontide, notably Robert Hunt’s Stabat mater from the Peterhouse Partbooks, and works relating to the life of St Paul. The composers will include Morales, Victoria, Marenzio, Willaert, Andrea Gabrieli and Cipriano de Rore.