

ST. GEORGE'S, BLOOMSBURY

Thursday 20th. December 1990

LONDON CONCORD SINGERS
Conductor: MALCOLM COTTLE

CANITE TUBA

Palestrina (1524-94)

Sound the trumpet in Sion, for the day of the Lord is near. Lo, he is coming to save us. The crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. Come, O Lord, and do not delay. Alleluia.

In this motet Palestrina allows himself an unusually high degree of madrigalian word-painting for his sacred music, with its opening fanfares and angular syncopations at 'the crooked shall be made straight'.

AUDIVI

John Taverner (c1495-1545)

I heard: there was a cry at midnight: lo the bridegroom approaches.

Taverner wrote a large amount of Latin church music during the earlier part of his life until he was converted to Protestantism during the reign of Henry VIII. After this he gave up composition entirely and devoted himself to the persecution of Catholics. This motet is in three short sections with the *cantus firmus* being carried by the Sopranos in the two outer sections, passing to the Altos in the middle.

ECCE VIRGO CONCIPIET

Heinrich Isaac (c1450-1517)

Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son: and shall call his name Emmanuel.

It is believed that Isaac was of Flemish origin, though in Italy he was known as 'Arrigo il Tedesco' (Harry the German). His *Choralis Constantinus*, a collection of nearly sixty offices for the church's year, from which this motet is taken, has been described by Alfred Einstein as '...one of the greatest documents not only in the history of music but also in the history of art'.

NE TIMEAS MARIA

Vittoria (c1548-1611)

Fear not, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; and he shall be called the Son of the Highest.

This motet by the Spanish master, Vittoria, is one of the most touching of all the Renaissance motets to the Virgin.

DIXIT MARIA

Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612)

Mary said to the angel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to your word".

Hassler was born in Nuremberg and was a member of a distinguished musical family. He studied in Venice under Andrea Gabrieli. This motet, together with its accompanying mass, is among the most performed of his works, although probably his best known piece is the so-called *Passion Chorale* which is based on one of his secular choral songs.

AVE GRATIA PLENA

Cornelius Verdonck (1563-1625)

Hail full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Not much seems to be known about the Flemish composer Verdonck, although apparently he was better known for his secular music, his madrigals being especially popular in England.

LAETENTUR CAELI

Hassler

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before God: for he comes to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with his truth.

This second motet by Hassler is in early Baroque style, with much use of word-painting, for instance the waves of the sea.

SONG TO VIRGIN MARY

Andrzej Panufnik (1914-)

Panufnik lived in his native Poland until 1954. He was conductor of the Cracow and Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestras. He left Poland for political reasons and has lived and worked since then in this country, indeed he has only felt able to return to Poland this year, following the political changes there. He was conductor of the Birmingham Orchestra (now the CBSO) from 1957-59, since when he has devoted himself to composition though he still manages to find time for some conducting.

Of the *Song to the Virgin Mary*, written in 1964 and revised in 1969, Panufnik has said "...my intention was to invoke the adoration, warmth and pure faith of the Polish peasant, for whom worship of the Virgin Mary has a very special closeness and significance". The melodic theme has a close relation to Polish folk music as well as some distant flavour of plainchant.

Like most of his music, the piece is based on a very rigid structure with the time signature ranging from eight to the bar down to four and back out to eight, the melody passes down through the voices and back up again, and the music passes through all twelve keys in a regular sequence. In the middle part of the work, in pianissimo, the voices intone rather than sing, with much emphasis on the rhythm of the words, characterising a peasant congregation in a country church.

INTERVAL 20 minutes

HODIE CHRISTUS NATUS EST Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)

Today Christ is born, alleluia. Today the Saviour has appeared, alleluia. Today on earth the angels sing and the archangels rejoice, noel. Today the just exult, saying: Glory to God in the highest, alleluia, noel.

This is probably the best known of all Renaissance Christmas motets. Sweelinck seems to have spent most of his life in Amsterdam where he was famed as much as an organist as a composer. His publications in secular and sacred music are many and he contributed greatly to the development of new vocal melody and rhythm.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS Giovanni Maria Nanino (c1543-1607)

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill. The angelic host rejoices because eternal salvation for mankind has appeared.

Nanino was a pupil of Palestrina and succeeded him as maestro di capella at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. During his lifetime he was considered the equal of his teacher, but, as in so many similar cases, this comparison has not stood the test of time. There is however much merit in his work as this excellent motet shows.

PASTORES LOQUEBANTUR Francisco Guerrero (1528-1599)

The shepherds said one to another: let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. Alleluia.

Guerrero was born in Seville where he studied under his brother, Pedro, and also for a time with another great Spanish composer, Morales. At various times he was maestro de capilla at the cathedrals of Jaen, Malaga, and finally at Seville itself. Pastores loquebantur is a lively evocation of the shepherds hurrying to Bethlehem, followed by the calm serenity of the stable.

MAGI VIDENTES STELLAM Blasius Amon (1560-1590)

The wise men, seeing the star, said one to another: This is the sign of a great king. Let us go and seek him, and offer gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Alleluia.

Amon was an Austrian, being born in the Tyrol, and dying, a mere thirty years later, in Vienna. He sang as a choirboy with the Archduke Ferdinand, who sent him to Venice to complete his musical studies. He eventually became a priest in the Franciscan monastery in Vienna, so it is not surprising that his entire output was sacred though full of inventiveness and vigour.

TRIA SUNT MUNERA Juan Esquivel (late 16th - early 17th century)

There are three precious gifts which the wise men brought to the Lord.

The Spanish composer, Esquivel, flourished at the beginning of the 17th. century. His work is very conservative in style, but nonetheless effective for that. He almost always used a cantus firmus which, in this instance, is in the 2nd. Soprano part.

OMNIS FUNDUS JOCUDETUR Michael Praetorius (1571-1621)

Let all the world rejoice at the birth of the saviour, whose chaste mother conceived him at the word of Gabriel: with sonorous voices and sincere hearts let us rejoice and celebrate today. Christ is born of the Virgin Mary: rejoice: let us therefore rejoice and be glad.

Praetorius was the greatest of the Lutheran composers. He held several important Kapellmeister positions including Luneberg and the court of the Duke of Brunswick. His output was prodigious, although, naturally, not much of it was in Latin. He had a special genius for providing rich varied and highly singable versions of German carols of which this is an example. Although not apparently written for two choirs the music, with its repetition of the musical phrases, does seem to lend itself to such treatment.

MASS in G minor Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

*Kyrie
Gloria
Credo
Sanctus/Benedictus
Agnus Dei*

Vaughan Williams was born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire. He was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge, with a two year spell at the Royal College of Music in between, and further studies there after university. In the early 1890's he became very active in the collection of English folk songs which were to be such a major influence on his work throughout his life.

The other great influence, particularly in his choral works, was the music, both sacred and secular, of the great English composers of Tudor times. In his Mass, which was completed in 1922 and dedicated to Gustav Holst and his Whitsuntide Singers, he has gone even further back, freely adapting mediaeval tonalities and methods of counterpoint. The Mass, which is for double choir and soloists, consists of the usual five movements.