

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 October 2022
1.00pm

Josquin's Legacy

The Gesualdo Six

Owain Park artistic director, bass
Guy James countertenor
Joseph Wicks tenor
Josh Cooter tenor
Michael Craddock baritone
Sam Mitchell bass

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Jean Mouton (c.1459-1522) | Tota pulchra es |
| Josquin des Prez (c.1450-1521) | Praeter rerum seriem |
| Antonius Divitis (c.1470-1530) | Ista est speciosa |
| Jean Lhéritier (c.1480-1551) | Salve regina |
| Antoine Brumel (c.1450-1512) | Sicut Lilium |
| Antoine de Févin (c.1470-1511) | Nesciens mater |
| Josquin des Prez | Nymphes des bois |
| | Mille regretz |
| Pierre La Rue (c.1452-1518) | Secretz regretz |
| Antoine Brumel | Tous les regretz |
| Loyset Compère (c.1445-1518) | Venez regretz |
| Costanzo Festa (c.1485-1545) | Quis dabit oculis (1514) |
| Josquin des Prez | O virgo prudentissima |
| | <i>Interspersed with plainchant</i> |



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The metaphor is right there for the taking: the name 'JOSQUINJ' carved into the wall of the Sistine Chapel, as deeply and indelibly embedded as the composer himself in the history of sacred music.

The temptation with such a cultural giant (not for nothing has Josquin been compared to Virgil and Copernicus) is to take him in isolation, the exception to the rule. But to do that is to forget the hundreds of other names scratched and clustered, many beyond recognition, around Josquin's on that choir loft wall – a visual patchwork as intricate and interconnected as the web of friendship, influence, imitation and homage that made up the music of the 15th and 16th centuries.

It's those threads and connections, many forged at the Court of Ferrara, that the Gesualdo Six explore today in a programme that places Josquin in context: at once the musical heir to the tradition of Ockeghem, contemporary to Mouton and Brumel, and influential model for the younger generation of Lhéritier and Festa.

The chain of influence begins with Johannes Ockeghem, whose legacy is keenly felt in **Josquin's** *Nymphes des bois*. When Ockeghem composed *Mort tu as navre/Miserere* in 1460, an elegy on the death of Burgundian elder statesman musician Gilles Binchois, he popularised the genre of the 'deploration': a musical lament and homage. When Ockeghem himself died in 1497, Josquin continued the sequence (extended still further on Josquin's own death, which provoked a flurry of musical tributes) with the motet-chanson *Nymphes des bois*.

What's striking about the work is how little it reflects Josquin's own style. Instead, the composer imitates the techniques of the man who may have taught him in his youth: the archaic tenor *cantus firmus* (quoting poignantly from the Requiem Mass) that anchors the counterpoint; the low-lying polyphony, knotty and dark on the ear.

The contrast between *Nymphes* and the other works of Josquin's we hear tonight reflects the shift that the composer helped bring about. Inheriting the more angular choral architecture of the late Middle Ages, Josquin softened its sharp Gothic points, revealing music of new evenness and classical order, marrying the intricacy of the Franco-Flemish school with the imitative beauty of the Italian.

The theme of regret – grief, loss or pain, usually at the absence of a beloved – emerged as a favourite theme in French poetry and music towards the end of the 15th Century. Grouped together as the 'regretz chansons', there are examples from most of the great Franco-Flemish composers. Josquin produced several, including the most famous, the plangent, four-voice lament *Mille regretz*, whose popularity propelled it across Europe, even reaching the Holy Roman Emperor himself.

The chanson became a touchstone for other composers – inspired by the mournful intensity of its spirit and text, as much as by its famous melody. **Brumel's** *Tous les regretz* draws real poignancy from ornaments and extensions to its cadences – simple phrases heightened by quasi-theatrical rhetoric: intricate lines that capture the jagged gasps and sighs of grief. Both **Compère's** *Venez regretz* and **La Rue's** *Secretz regretz* are more rhythmic and sprightly, retaining a sense of dance beneath their sombre texts. Theirs is a

courtlier kind of loss – grief that's performed with one eye to the audience, never less than poised and elegant.

But if the second half broods on death and loss, the concert opens with birth and the miracle of the Immaculate Conception. Sometimes used as an antiphon for that feast, the lovely *Song of Songs* text *Tota pulchra es* is heard here in a setting by influential French composer **Jean Mouton**. The four voices cluster close, creating an intimacy that deliberately seems to blur spiritual awe with sensuality, as melismas linger and caress the word *pulchra* ('beautiful').

Josquin's *Praeter rerum seriem* mirrors the wonder and awe of the same subject in music that struck one 19th-century commentator powerfully: 'It is as if,' he wrote, 'one is entering a temple of the Mysteries...short motifs like strange hieroglyphs woven together'. Low-lying counterpoint creates a cloudy, occluded effect, disorientation aided by rhythmic manipulations: are we in duple or triple time? Both parts of the motet are woven around a Marian chant, sometime clearly audible, sometimes slowed beyond recognition, creating the sense of solemn rite happening beyond our grasp and comprehension.

Antoine de Fevin's *Nesciens mater* takes its Nativity antiphon and brings the exhilaration of new life into music that unfolds with fluid and swift-flowing polyphony, the four voices weaving and diving among one another in joyful imitation. **Jean Lhéritier's** *Salve Regina* is typical of the younger composer's graceful style – a bridge between Josquin and the smooth consonance of Palestrina, six voices carefully balanced with translucent clarity.

Grace and clarity reach their peak in Brumel's exquisite Marian miniature *Sicut Liliun*. A contemporary and sometime pupil of Josquin's, the composer is at his most distilled in this *Song of Songs* setting, its waves of imitative near-homophony creating a rapt mood: at once still and in constant motion. There may be a connection to Josquin's own five-voice *Stabat Mater* (and a broader set of Marian works) in the falling triadic motif with which the work opens.

The fragrant sensuality of the *Song of Songs* also provides the text for **Antonius Divitis's** five-voice *Ista est speciosa*. While strict canon underpins the motet, the rigidity of form is belied by the work's organic, lyrical character, established immediately in the expressive arabesques of the opening alto line. Employed as a singing master at the court of Anne of Brittany, it's likely that Divitis encountered Italian composer **Costanzo Festa**, whose lament on the death of the queen – *Quis dabit oculis* – is grief at its most intimate, unfolding over three self-contained sections with a restraint that only intensifies the sense of loss.

We close not with lamentation however but rapture, and a return to the music of Josquin, whose *O virgo prudentissima* combines a humanist poem of intercession to the Virgin with the 'Beata Mater' chant. Rather than maintain two discrete texts and musical worlds, this unusual work sees the chant text spilling out from the tenor into all parts: structural rules and conventions are subsumed and overpowered by simple faith.

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Jean Mouton (c.1459-1522)

Tota pulchra es
Liturgical text **You are altogether beautiful**

Tota pulchra es, amica mea;
Et macula non est in te. You are altogether beautiful, my love;
there is no flaw in you.

Josquin des Prez (c.1450-1521)

Praeter rerum seriem
Liturgical text **This is no normal scheme of things**

Praeter rerum seriem
Parit deum hominem
Virgo mater.
Nec vir tangit virginem
Nec prolis originem
Novit pater. 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.

Virtus sancti spiritus
Opus illud coelitus
Operatur.
Initus et exitus
Partus tui penitus
Quis scrutatur? 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?

Dei providentia
Quae disponit omnia
Tam suave.
Tua puerperia
Transfer in mysteria.
Mater ave. By God's grace, which orders all things so smoothly,
your childbearing confronts us with a mystery.
Hail, Mother.

Antonius Divitis (c.1470-1530)

Ista est speciosa
Liturgical text **This one is special**

Ista est speciosa,
inter filias Hierusalem
sicut vidistis eam
plenam caritate et delictionem. This one is special among the daughters of Jerusalem,
as she is seen full of love and affection.

Jean Lhéritier (c.1480-1551)

Salve regina
Liturgical text **Hail, Holy Queen**

Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae,
Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra,
Salve!
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii [H]evae,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes,
In hac lacrimarum valle. Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy,
[hail] our life, our sweetness and our hope!
To thee do we cry, exiled children of Eve,
to thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.

Antoine Brumel (c.1450-1512)

Sicut Liliium
Liturgical text **As the lily**

Sicut liliium inter spinas,
Sic amica mea inter filias. As the lily among thorns,
so is my love among the daughters.

Antoine de Févin (c.1470-1511)

Nesciens mater
Liturgical text **Knowing no man, the Virgin mother**

Nesciens mater virgo virum
Peperit sine dolore
Salvatorem saeculorum.
Ipsium 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.

Virgo hodie fidelis etsi verbum
Genuit incarnatum virgo mansit
Et post partum quam laudantes omnes
Dicimus benedicta tu in mulieribus.
Amen The faithful Virgin brings forth the incarnate Word today,
she remains a virgin during and after birth and we all praise her
saying blessed are you among women.
Amen

Josquin des Prez

Nymphes des bois

Jean Molinet

Nymphes des bois,
déeses des
fontaines,
Chantres experts de toutes
nations,
Changez voz voix fort clères
et haultaines
En cris tranchantz et
lamentations.
Car d'Atropos tres terrible
satrape
Vostr'Okeghem a trape en sa
trape,
Le vray trésor de musique'et
chief d'œuvre,
(Qui de trépas désormais
plus n'eschappe,)
Dont grant doumaige'est
que la terre coœuvre.
Acoutez vous d'abitiz de
deuil,
Josquin, Perchon, Brumel,
Compère,
Et plorez grosses larmes
d'œil;
Perdu avez vostre bon
père.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.
AMEN.

Requiem aeternam dona eis
Domine
Et lux perpetua luceat
eis.

Mille regretz

Anonymous

Mille regretz de vous
abandonner
Et d'eslonger vostre fache
amoureuse,
Jay si grand dueil et paine
douloureuse,
Quon me verra brief mes
jours definer.

Nymphs of the woods

Nymphs of the woods,
goddesses of the
fountains
singers renowned across
all nations,
turn your voices most
clear and high
to piercing cries and
laments.
Because Atropos, the
terrible satrap,
Has caught your
Okeghem in her trap,
the true treasure and
masterpiece of music,
(who from death no
longer escapes,)
for whom great mourning
covers the earth.
Put on your clothes of
mourning,
Josquin, Perchon,
Brumel, Compère,
and weep great tears
from your eyes;
you have lost your good
father.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.
AMEN.

Give them eternal rest,
Lord,
and let perpetual light
shine on them.

A thousand regrets

A thousand regrets at
deserting you
and leaving behind your
loving face,
I feel so much sadness and
such painful distress,
that it seems to me my days
will soon dwindle away.

Pierre La Rue (c.1452-1518)

Secretz regretz

Anonymous

Secretz regretz de nature
enemis
Par grief tourmens mon
penser ont transmis
De tout plaisir en
deuil et
desplaisance;
Si de brief temps
je n'ay
resjouissance
Par le secours de mes loyaux
amis.

Secret regrets

Secret regrets of natural
enemies;
by previous torments my
thoughts have changed
from all pleasure into
mourning and
displeasure.
Perhaps from this short
time I will be
remembered,
with the help of my loyal
friends.

Antoine Brumel

Tous les regretz

Anonymous

Tous les regretz quonques
furent au monde,
De Venez a moy Quelque
part que je soie.
Prennez mon cueur En sa
dolleur, leur par fonde
Et le fendes que madame le
voye.

All the sadness

All the sadness that has
ever been of this world,
come hither to me,
wherever I may be.
Take my heart in its deep
grief
and cleave it in twain when
suddenly I see her.

Loyset Compère (c.1445-1518)

Venez regretz

Anonymous

Venez regretz, venez, il en
est heure,
Venez sur moy faire vostre
demeure;
C'est bien raison qu'à ce je
vous en horte.
Car aujourd'huy toute ma
joye est morte,
Et sy ne voy âme qui me
sequeure.

Come sorrows

Come sorrows, come, it is
time,
come upon me to make
your abode;
it is quite right that I urge
you to do so.
Because today all my joy
is dead,
and there is no soul that
sequesters me.

A celle fin que mon cueur
sente et pleure
Le mal qu'il a et en quoy il
labeure,
Je suis contraint vous ouvrir
la grant porte:
Venez regretz, venez...

At the end that my heart
feels and cries
the evil he has and in
what he labor,
I am forced to open the
main door for you:
come sorrows, come...

Costanzo Festa (c.1485-1545)

Quis dabit oculis (1514)

Anonymous

Quis dabit oculis nostris
fontem lacrymarum

Et plorabimus die ac
nocte coram
Domino?

Britannia, quid
ploras? Musica
sileat.

Francia, cur deducta lugubri
veste moerore
consumeris?

Anna. Requiescat in pace.

Who will give our eyes

Who will give our eyes a
fountain of tears?

And we shall weep day
and night in the
presence of the Lord.

Brittany, why do you
lament? Let music keep
silent.

France, why did you tear
your vest in mourning and
are spent with grief?

May Anne rest in peace.

Josquin des Prez

O virgo prudentissima

Angelo Poliziano

O Virgo prudentissima

Quam coelo missus
Gabriel

Supremi regis
nuntius

Plenam testatur gratia.

O Virgin most wise

O Virgin most wise

whom Gabriel, sent from
heaven

as messenger of the
most-high king,

affirms as full of grace,

Te sponsam factor
omnium,

Te Matrem Dei
Filius,

Te vocat habitaculum
Suum beatus spiritus.

The maker of everything
called you wife,

the Son of God called you
mother,

the blessed Spirit calls you
his home.

Tu stella maris
diceris

Quae nobis inter
scopulos,

Inter obscuros turbines
Portum salutis indicas.

You are called star of the
sea,

You who show us among
the rocks

and dark winds
the harbour of salvation.

Per te de tetro
carcere

Antiqui patres
exerunt;

Per te nobis
astriferae

Panduntur aulae
limina.

Through you the ancient
fathers

are freed from their foul
prison;

through you are opened
to us

the gates of the starry
palace.

Audi Virgo puerpera

Et sola Mater

integra;

Audi precantes quesimus

Tuos Maria servulos.

Hear, child-bearing virgin

and the only mother who

remains unblemished;

hear your servants praying

as we call to you, Mary.

Repelle mentis

tenebras

Disrumpe cordis glaciem.

Nos sub tuum praesidium

Confugientes protege.

Alleluia.

Drive the shadows from
our minds,

shatter the ice in our hearts.

Protect us, who take refuge

under your guardianship.

Alleluia.

All texts and translations kindly provided by the artists.