

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 16 April 2025
7.30pm

Leçons de Ténèbres

Les Arts Florissants

William Christie director, organ	Hugo Abraham violone
Emmanuel Resche-Caserta violin	Sébastien Marq recorder
Sophie de Bardonèche violin	Tiam Goudarzi recorder
Myriam Rignol viola da gamba	Sergio Bucheli theorbo

Ilja Aksionov tenor

Padraic Rowan bass-baritone

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

(1643-1704)

Prélude from *Missa Assumpta est Maria* H11 (?1669)

Troisième leçon de Ténèbres du Mercredi Saint pour une basse H141 (?1690)

Premier répons après la première leçon du second nocturne du Jeudi Saint "Tanquam ad latronem" H133 (?1690)

Second répons après la seconde leçon du second nocturne du Jeudi Saint "Tenebrae factae sunt" H129 (?1690)

Prélude from *Orphée descendant aux enfers* H471 (1683)

Seconde leçon de Ténèbres du Mercredi Saint H138 (?1690)

Troisième répons après la troisième leçon du second nocturne du Mercredi Saint "Unus ex discipulis" H132 (?1690)

Troisième répons après la troisième leçon du second nocturne du Vendredi Saint "Ecce quomodo" H131 (?1690)

Symphonies pour un reposoir H515 (?1670)

Troisième leçon du Vendredi Saint H95 (?1670)

Second répons après la seconde leçon du premier nocturne du Mercredi Saint "Tristis est anima mea" H126 (?1690)



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Between 1665 and 1667, the 20-something **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** sought inspiration in Rome. The Italian capital was one of the most artistically and musically influential cities of the day and the young French composer was keen to learn from its finest. Although it's thought Charpentier went to Italy ostensibly to study painting, he nevertheless spent three years under the guidance of the great oratorio composer Giacomo Carissimi, during which time his music took on something of an Italian accent, his harmonies becoming accordingly more chromatic, his vocal lines more melismatic (as opposed to French music's largely single-syllable-per-note treatment). You'll hear a blend of these two styles in this concert's opening work, the *Troisième leçon de Ténèbres du Mercredi Saint* scored for solo bass voice, two violins and basso continuo. Note how the bass soloist declaims much of the text, before the music seems momentarily to forget itself, and spills over into a more florid, descriptive style. Think of perhaps a musical hybrid of the French 'air de cour', a type of secular song combining elements of a declamatory recitative and an aria, and early Italian opera or oratorio.

This type of startlingly original music was welcomed and shunned in equal measure. One contemporary suggested that his music 'brought a sense of finesse to chromatic sounds', another branded his music as 'barbaric'. Today, Charpentier is regarded as one of 17th-century France's most original and consistently brilliant composers. And although he wrote for almost every genre of music, from opera to organ works, his liturgical output alone (over 500 works) makes him one of his period's most prolific composers. We partly have Charpentier's lack of a royal appointment to thank for the sheer breadth of his church music, which takes in masses, psalm settings, antiphons and, of course, Tenebrae lessons and responses. Untethered to a royal chapel (or to the Paris Opera, for that matter, monopolised as it was by Lully), Charpentier was free to write whenever and for whomever he pleased.

Charpentier wrote 54 sets of Tenebrae lessons and responses at various points throughout his life, following on from a long musical tradition stretching back to the 15th Century. In essence, Tenebrae settings are musical responses to the liturgy used at Passiontide and are based on texts from the Old Testament 'Lamentations of Jeremiah' (a series of laments bewailing the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC) and on the plainchant melody 'tonus lamentations'. Using texts from Lamentations at this point in the church year draws a direct parallel between the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem, and the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. Tenebrae settings were intended to be performed for the Offices of Matins during three days of Holy Week (the 'sacrum triduum'): Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday (three lessons would be sung each day). The word 'Tenebrae' refers to the gradual extinguishing during the service of 15 candles arranged in a triangle, and although 'Matins' suggests a morning service, traditionally these would be held the evening before. Hence the references to 'Mercredi Saint' (the evening before Maundy Thursday), or 'Jeudi Saint' (the evening before Good Friday), and so forth. The Catholic church only put a stop to this rather confusing tradition in 1956.

The three services themselves would have been relatively straightforward, liturgically, with each one divided into three 'Nocturnes', each featuring three psalms and three readings, or lessons (only the lessons of the first Nocturne were set to music and sung). Each of the psalms were preceded and followed by an antiphon, while each lesson concluded with a Responsory. Music played a crucial part in these services, and Charpentier clearly recognised the opportunities.

It would be almost impossible, however, to reconstruct an entire Tenebrae service from Charpentier's scores as composers were never required to set the entire texts on any of the three days, to keep the services to realistic lengths. But here you can experience a broad range of Charpentier's Tenebrae music, offering a valuable insight into the composer's varied musical treatments and styles. This selection includes one of his very earliest works, the *Troisième leçon du Vendredi Saint*, H95 – already you can hear a composer testing harmonic boundaries, its string introduction shifting in hypnotically strange directions, its vocal lines yearningly expressive. And there is exquisite beauty, too, in the *Premier répons après la première leçon du second nocturne du Jeudi Saint "Tanquam ad latronem"* H133, overflowing with Italian emotion. Otherwise, simply delight in the sheer invention and richness of Charpentier's scoring that would have contributed significant variety to otherwise formulaic acts of worship.

Interspersed amongst the Tenebrae settings are three of the many instrumental works that flowed from Charpentier's pen, from symphonies and incidental music to work for smaller ensemble. First, however, is the *Prélude* of *Simphonie* from his last and perhaps finest mass, the *Assumpta est Maria* composed around 1699. The opening music is brief but full of contrapuntal interest and surely ranks as one of the composer's most beautiful passages.

Charpentier's cantata *Orphée descendant aux enfers* H471 (not to be confused with the composer's chamber opera *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers* H488) is perhaps the earliest example of a French cantata, or secular entertainment (quite different from the liturgical cantata of Bach's world). With its heady mix of Italian and French styles, *Orphée descendant aux enfers*, completed in 1683, sets a small portion of the Greek Orpheus legend in a chamber work of around 20 minutes. The bittersweet opening prelude is a short but divine example of Charpentier's instinct for exquisite harmonic textures. Listen out for the prominent violin, representing Orpheus's lyre as he descends to the underworld.

The ten-minute suite *Symphonies pour un reposoir* H515, probably from the late 1670s, is somewhat unique – there don't appear to be any similar works by any of Charpentier's contemporaries. Essentially, these 'Symphonies for a Repository' were composed for Fête-Dieu, or Corpus Christi, accompanying the procession through the streets of the Holy Sacrament. A temporary altar is placed on a street corner, a group of musicians positioned nearby. As the procession approaches, the overture strikes up ('from when one can see the banner'), with the music (and additional plainsong) accompanying prayers and benedictions until the priest moves on to the sound of a graceful *Allemande*.

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Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1643-1704)

Prélude from *Missa Assumpta est Maria* H11 (?1669)

Troisième leçon de Ténèbres du Mercredi Saint pour une basse H141 (?1690)

Liturgical text

Jod

Manum suam misit
hostis
Ad omnia desiderabilia ejus:
Quia vidit gentes
ingressas sanctuarium
suum,
De quibus praeceperas ne
intrarent
In ecclesiam tuam.

Caph

Omnis populus ejus gemens,
Et quaerens panem:
dederunt pretiosa
quaeque
Pro cibo, ad refocillandam
animam.
Vide Domine et considera,
Quoniam facta sum vilis.

Lamed

O vos omnes qui transitis
per viam, attendite,
Et videte si est
dolor sicut dolor
meus;
Quoniam vindemiavit me,
Ut locutus est Dominus
in die irae furoris
sui.

Mem

De excelso misit ignem in
ossibus meis
Et erudit
me;
Expandit rete pedibus
meis,
Convertit me retrorsum:
posuit me desolatam,
tota die moerore confectam.

Third Tenebrae Lesson for the Wednesday of Holy Week (for bass)

Jod

The adversary hath
spread out his hand
upon all her pleasant things:
for she hath seen that the
heathen entered into
her sanctuary,
whom thou didst command
that they should not enter
into thy congregation.

Caph

All her people sigh,
they seek bread; they
have given their
pleasant things
for meat to relieve the
soul:
see, O Lord, and consider;
for I am become vile.

Lamed

Is it nothing to you, all ye
that pass by? Behold,
and see if there be any
sorrow like unto my
sorrow,
which is done unto me,
wherewith the Lord hath
afflicted me in the day
of his fierce anger.

Mem

From above hath he sent
fire into my bones,
and it prevaleth against
them:
he hath spread a net for
my feet,
he hath turned me back:
he hath made me desolate
and faint all the day.

Nun

Vigilavit jugum
iniquitatum
meorum:
In manu ejus convolutae sunt,
Et impositae collo meo;
infirmata est virtus
mea.
Dedit me Dominus in
manu,
De qua non potero
surgere.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
convertere
Ad Dominum Deum tuum.

Premier répons après la première leçon du second nocturne du Jeudi Saint "Tanquam ad latronem" H133 (?1690)

Liturgical text

Tanquam ad latronem
existis
Cum gladiis et fustibus
comprehendere me;
Quotidie apud vos eram in
templo docens,
Et non me tenuistis;
Et ecce flagellatum ducitis
Ad crucifigendum.

Cumque injecissent manus
in Jesum,
Et, tenuissent eum, dixit ad
eos:
'Quotidie apud vos eram in
Templo docens,
Et non me tenuistis.'

Nun

The yoke of my
transgressions is
bound by his hand:
they are wreathed,
and come up upon my
neck: he hath made my
strength to fall,
the Lord hath delivered
me into their hands,
from whom I am not able
to rise up.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
return
unto the Lord thy God.

First Responary after the First Lesson of the Second Nocturne for Maundy Thursday *Tanquam ad latronem*

Are ye come out as
against a thief
with swords and staves
for to take me?
I sat daily with you
teaching in the temple,
and ye laid no hold on me;
and behold you scourge me
and lead me to be crucified.

And when they had laid
hands on Jesus
and taken him, he said to
them:
'I sat daily with you
teaching in the temple,
and ye laid no hold on me.'

**Second répons après
la seconde leçon du
second nocturne du
Jeudi Saint "Tenebrae
factae sunt" H129**

(?1690)

Liturgical text

Tenebræ factæ sunt,
Dum crucifixissent Jesum
Judæi:
Et circa horam nonam
exclamavit Jesus voce
magna:
Deus meus, utquid me
dereliquisti?
Et inclinato capite emisit
spiritum.
Exclamans Jesus voce
magna ait:
Pater in manus tuas
commendo spiritum meum.

**Second Responary
after the Second
Lesson of the
Second Nocturne
for Maundy
Thursday *Tenebrae
factae sunt***

Darkness fell
as the Jews crucified
Jesus:
and about the ninth hour
Jesus cried with a loud
voice:
My God, why hast thou
forsaken me?
And he bowed his head,
and gave up the ghost.
When Jesus had cried with a
loud voice, he said,
'Father into thy hands I
commend my spirit.'

**Prélude from *Orphée descendant aux enfers*
H471 (1683)**

**Seconde leçon de
Ténèbres du Mercredi
Saint H138 (?1690)**

Liturgical text

Vau
Et egressus est a filia
Sion omnis decor
ejus:
Facti sunt principes ejus
velut arietes
Non invenientes pascua;
Et abierunt absque
fortitudine
Ante faciem subsequentis.

Zain
Recordata est Jerusalem
dierum afflictionis suae,
Et praevaricationis omnium
desiderabilium suorum,
Quae habuerat a diebus
antiquis,
Cum caderet populus ejus in
manu hostili,
Et non esset auxiliator:
Viderunt eam hostes,
Et deriserunt sabbata
ejus.

**Second Tenebrae
Lesson for the
Wednesday of Holy
Week**

Vau
And from the daughter of
Zion all her beauty is
departed:
her princes are become
like harts
that find no pasture,
and they are gone
without strength
before the pursuer.

Zain
Jerusalem remembered in
the days of her affliction
and of her miseries all her
pleasant things
that she had in the days
of old,
when her people fell into
the hand of the enemy,
and none did help her:
the adversaries saw her,
and did mock at her
sabbaths.

Heth
Peccatum peccavit
Jerusalem,
Propterea instabilis facta est;
Omnes qui glorificabant eam,
Spreverunt illam,
Quia viderunt ignominiam
ejus:
Ipsa autem gemens
conversa est retrorsum.

Teth
Sordes ejus in pedibus ejus,
Nec recordata est finis
sui:
Deposita est
vehementer,
Non habens consolatorem.
Vide Domine afflictionem
meam,
Quoniam erectus est
inimicus.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
convertere
Ad Dominum Deum tuum.

**Troisième répons
après la troisième
leçon du second
nocturne du Mercredi
Saint "Unus ex
discipulis" H132 (?1690)**

Liturgical text

Unus ex discipulis meis
tradet me hodie;
Vae illi, per quem tradar
ego,
Melius illi erat si
natus non
fuisset.

Qui intingit mecum manum
in paropside
Hic me traditurus est in
manus peccatorum.

Heth
Jerusalem hath
grievously sinned;
therefore she is removed:
all that honoured her
despise her,
because they have seen
her nakedness:
yea, she sigheth, and
turneth backward.

Teth
Her filthiness is in her skirts;
she remembereth not her
last end;
therefore she came down
wonderfully:
she had no comforter.
O Lord, behold my
affliction:
for the enemy hath
magnified himself.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
return
unto the Lord thy God.

**Third Responary
after the Third
Lesson of the
Second Nocturne
for the Wednesday
of Holy Week *Unus
ex discipulis***

One of my disciples will
betray me today;
woe unto that man by
whom I am betrayed!
It had been better for that
man if he had not been
born.

He that dippeth his hand
with me in the dish,
the same shall deliver me
into the hands of sinners.

**Troisième répons
après la troisième
leçon du second
nocturne du Vendredi
Saint "Ecce quomodo"
H131 (?1690)**

Liturgical text

Ecce quomodo moritur
justus
Et nemo percipit
corde;
Et viri justii
tolluntur,
Et nemo considerat.
A facie iniquitatis ablati est
justus;
Et erit in pace memoria
ejus.

Tamquam agnus coram
tondente se obmutuit,
Et non aperuit os
suum:
De angustia, et de iudicio
sublatus est.

**Third Responary
after the Third
Lesson of the
Second Nocturne
for Good Friday
*Ecce quomodo***

Behold the righteous
perisheth,
and no man layeth it to
heart:
and merciful men are
taken away,
and none considereth it.
The righteous is taken away
from the evil to come;
and his memory shall
enter into peace.

As a sheep before her
shearers is dumb,
so he openeth not his
mouth:
he was taken from prison
and from judgment.

Symphonies pour un reposoir H515 (?1670)

**Troisième leçon du
Vendredi Saint H95
(?1670)**

Liturgical text

*Incipit oratio Jeremiae
Prophetae.*

Recordare, Domine, quid
acciderit nobis; intuere et
respice opprobrium
nostrum.

Haereditas nostra versa est
ad alienos, domus nostrae
ad extraneos.

Pupilli facti sumus absque
patre, matres nostrae
quasi viduae.

Aquam nostram pecunia
bibimus; ligna nostra
pretio comparavimus.

Cervicibus nostris
minabamur, lassibus non
dabatur requies.

Ægypto dedimus
manum et Assiriis,
ut saturaremur
pane.

**Third Lesson for
Good Friday**

*The opening of the prayer
of the prophet Jeremiah:*

Remember, O Lord, what
is come upon us:
consider, and behold
our reproach.

Our inheritance is turned
to strangers, our
houses to aliens.

We are orphans and
fatherless, our mothers
are as widows.

We have drunken our
water for money; our
wood is sold unto us.

Our necks are under
persecution: we labour,
and have no rest.

We have given the hand
to the Egyptians, and to
the Assyrians, to be
satisfied with bread.

Patres nostri peccaverunt,
et non sunt: et nos
iniquitates eorum
portavimus.

Servi dominati sunt
nostri: non fuit qui
redimeret de manu
eorum.

In animabus nostris
afferebamus panem
nobis, a facie gladii in
deserto.

Pellis nostra quasi clibanus
exusta est, a facie
tempestatum famis.

Mulieres in Sion
humiliaverunt, et virgines
in civitatibus Juda.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
convertere

Ad Dominum Deum tuum.

Our fathers have sinned,
and are not; and we
have borne their
iniquities.

Servants have ruled over
us: there is none that
doth deliver us out of
their hand.

We gat our bread with the
peril of our lives
because of the sword of
the wilderness.

Our skin was black like an
oven because of the
terrible famine.

They ravished the women in
Zion, and the maids in the
cities of Judah.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
return

unto the Lord thy God.

**Second répons après
la seconde leçon du
premier nocturne du
Mercredi Saint "Tristis
est anima mea" H126
(?1690)**

Liturgical text

Tristis est anima
mea usque ad
mortem:

Sustinete hic, et vigilate
mecum:

Nunc videbitis turbam quæ
circumdabit me:

Vos fugam capietis, et ego
vadam immolari pro
vobis.

Ecce appropinquat hora,
et filius hominis tradetur
in manus
peccatorum.

Vos fugam capietis, et ego
vadam immolari pro
vobis.

**Second Responary
after the Second
Lesson of the First
Nocturne for the
Wednesday of Holy
Week *Tristis est
anima mea***

My soul is exceeding
sorrowful, even unto
death:

tarry ye here, and watch
with me.

Now ye will see a
multitude surround me:

ye will take flight, and I
shall go to be sacrificed
for you.

Behold the hour has come,
and the Son of Man will be
delivered into the hands
of sinners.

Ye will take flight and I
shall go to be sacrificed
for you.