

Cappella Pratensis – Williams College – Tuesday, October 29, 2019
Thompson Memorial Chapel, Williamstown, Massachusetts

Missa Maria zart
A Renaissance Masterpiece

Program note

Born in the Flemish city of Ghent in 1457/8 to one of the city trumpeters, Jacob Obrecht's eventful career took in a succession of posts as choirmaster throughout the Low Countries. In 1487-78 he spent a year in Ferrara at the invitation of the music-loving duke Ercole I d'Este. He returned nearly twenty years later in 1504 as the duke's chapelmaster, but the following winter Ercole died unexpectedly and Obrecht was dismissed; by the end of the summer he too died of plague. The bulk of Obrecht's surviving output consists of 30-odd mass cycles, nearly all based on known *cantus firmi*. Obrecht's ingenuity in re-working these materials makes fascinating study, but in his lifetime he was famous for his melodic fluency (he is reputed to have composed an entire Mass in a single day) and the balance of his compositions.

When Obrecht composed *Missa Maria zart* isn't known, but there are good reasons for thinking it one of his very last Masses. Its use of a monophonic German devotional song as *cantus firmus* is unique in his Mass *oeuvre* and its only surviving source is a print issued in Basel within a few years of his death. All this suggests a Germanic origin. As it happens, Obrecht stopped at the court of Maximilian I at Innsbruck on his last journey to Ferrara and was paid for composing at least one Mass, likely at Maximilian's request. Although that Mass was probably not *Maria zart* (the equally impressive *Missa Sub tuum presidium* being a more likely candidate) this stay is nevertheless the most plausible known context for its composition.

Missa Maria zart is one of the longest *cantus firmus* Masses that survives, lasting nearly an hour. Even by Obrecht's standards it is unusually ambitious, complex, and inventive. Using a procedure peculiar to Obrecht, the *Maria zart* tune is broken up into segments, to which the tune naturally lends in itself due to its short phrases and simple note values. The tenor voice (in the middle of the texture) presents these segments gradually throughout the Mass, a few in each section but always in their correct order, first in long note values and then speeding up gradually during each section. The last segment having been reached in the Hosanna (coinciding with the elevation of the host) the entire tune is stated in long notes in the Agnus dei, first in the bass (Agnus I) and finally, most audibly of all, in the top voice (Agnus III). But even in the sections where the tenor is silent (the Christe, the two central duos in the Gloria and the central trios in the last three movements) the tune appears in different (dis)guises, some clearly audible and others cunningly hidden.

The Basel partbooks being somewhat problematic for practical use, Cappella Pratensis sing from a newly commissioned copy in choirbook format, handmade by bass-singer Marc Busnel. The singers' preparation of the very complex notation took place under my guidance as part of a project in collaboration with the Alamire Foundation (University of Leuven, Belgium).

For this performance, Cappella Pratensis is evoking the liturgical form of a Mass by presenting the Missa Maria zart in the context of the plainsong propers appropriate for a Marian feast. The choice of these chants has a special meaning for Cappella Pratensis as we are singing them from facsimiles of a manuscript that forms part of a music collection in our “home town” of ’s-Hertogenbosch (The Netherlands). This manuscript, a choirbook known as the “Codex Smijers” is held in the archives of the Confraternity of Our Illustrious Lady, a paraliturgical organization that has formed part of the church of St. John in that city for more than 700 years. The music collection represents one of the rare cases where musical sources are still held by the institution for which they were made. The Codex Smijers, made in the early years of the sixteenth century, is unusual because it contains both chant and polyphony. The splendid calligraphy and illumination of this source make it a valuable part of the musical heritage of the province of North-Brabant. Cappella Pratensis is proud to share this heritage with the wider world on this tour. In accordance with the formulary as presented in this source, we will sing the Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, and Communion will be sung, but there is no Offertory. – Stratton Bull

Texts

Maria zart

Maria zart von edler Art
ein Ross ohn aller Dornen;
du hast mit Macht herwieder bracht
das vor lang war verloren.
Durch Adams Fall dir hat die Wahl
Sanct Gabriel versprochen,
hilf dass nit werd gerochen.
Mein Sünd und Schuld erwirb mir Huld,
dann kein Trost is wo du nit bist,
Barmherzigkeit erwerben.
Am letzten End bitt dich niet wend
von mir in meinen Sterben.

Sweet Mary, of noble kind,
a rose without any thorns;
you have mightily brought back
what long was lost.
Through Adam’s fall, to you has fallen the
choice promised by St. Gabriel:
help that I be not revenged.
Give me protection for my sins and guilt,
For where you are not, there is no
consolation: be merciful.
And at the very end, I pray you, turn not
away from me at my death.

Salve sancta parens

Salve sancta parens, enixa puerpera regem,
qui celum terramque regit in secula
seculorum.
V. Sentiant omnes tum juvamen quicumque
celebrant tuam commemorationen.
Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Sicut
erat in principio et nunc et semper et in
secula seculorum. Amen.

Hail, holy mother, who in childbirth brought
forth the king who rules heaven and earth,
world without end.
V. May all those who keep your
commemoration enjoy your help and
protection.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to
the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be, world without
end. Amen.

Kyrie

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy on us.
Christ, have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us.

Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
et in terra pax hominibus
bone voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
Gratias agimus tibi,
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, rex celestis,
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
Jesu Christe.
Cum Sancto Spiritu
in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

Benedicta et venerabilis es

Benedicta et venerabilis es, Virgo Maria,
que sine tactu pudoris inventa es Mater
salvatoris.

Alleluia

Alleluia. Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus
tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus. Alleluia.

Glory be to God on high,
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.
Lord, God, heavenly king,
God the Father almighty,
Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.

You who take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
You who take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
You who sit at the right hand of the Father
have mercy on us.
For you alone are holy,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the most high,
Jesus Christ
with the Holy Spirit
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Blessed and venerable are you, O Virgin
Mary, who, without spot, were found the
mother of the savior.

Alleluia. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord
is with you, blessed are you among women.
Alleluia.

Credo

Credo in unum Deum,
Patrem omnipotentem,
factorem celi et terre,
visibilium omnium, et invisibilium.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum
Filium Dei unigenitum
et ex Patre natum ante omnia secula;
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 celis
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 celum,
sedet ad dexteram Patris,
et iterum venturus est cum gloria,
iudicare vivos et mortuos:
cujus regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum
Dominum et vivificantem,
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre Filioque
simul adoratur et conglorificatur;
qui locutus est per prophetas.
Et in unam, sanctam, catholicam,
et apostolicam ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi seculi. Amen.

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
only begotten Son of God
born of the Father before all ages;
God of God, light of light,
true God of true God
begotten, not made;
being of one substance with the Father:
through whom all things were made.
Who for us men
and for our salvation
came down from heaven.
And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit
from the Virgin Mary:
and was made man.
He was crucified also for us
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered and was buried:
And the third day he rose again
according to the scriptures,
and ascended to heaven,
and sits at the right hand of the Father,
and he shall come again in glory,
to judge both the quick and the dead:
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And in the Lord, the Holy Spirit,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
Who with the Father and the Son
together is worshipped and glorified,
who spoke through the prophets.
And in one holy, catholic
and apostolic church.
I acknowledge one baptism
for the remission of sins.
And I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prefatio

Per omnia secula seculorum.

Amen.

V. Dominus vobiscum.

R. Et cum spiritu tuo.

V. Sursum corda.

R. Habemus ad Dominum.

V. Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro.

R. Dignum et justum est.

Through all ages of ages.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is fitting and just to do so.

Vere dignum et justum est, equum et salutare, nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere, Domine sancte pater omnipotens eterne Deus, et te in commemorationem beate Marie semper virginis, collaudare benedicere et predicare. Cum quibus et nostras voces ut admitti jubeas deprecamur supplici confessione dicentes:

It is truly fitting and just, right and salutary, that at all times and everywhere we should give you thanks, holy Lord, almighty Father, eternal God, and to praise you, bless you and tell forth your greatness in the commemoration of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin. We pray that you may bid our voices also to be admitted with them as we say in humble acknowledgement:

Sanctus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus

Dominus Deus Sabaoth.

Pleni sunt celi et terra gloria tua.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit

in nomine Domini.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, Holy, Holy

Lord, God of Hosts.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord:

Hosanna in the highest.

Pater noster

Pater noster, qui es in celis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in celo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.

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

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

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

[Cantus firmus:] Maria zart...

Sweet Mary... [see above]

Beata viscera

Beata viscera Marie virginis,
que portaverunt eterni Patris Filium.

Blessed be the womb of the Virgin Mary
which carried the son of the eternal father.

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