

Early Music Christmas

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 1
Sunday 5th December 2004

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MUSIC: Bach "In dulci júbilo" CD 44909-00 1 tr. 10 1:00

KANE: Hello! I'm Ciaran Kane, and I welcome you to stay with me now for
(voice-over) the coming 50 + minutes, to listen to a suite of Early Music on the
theme of Christmas. No, it's *not* all carols ----- though you *may*
recognise Bach in the background --- one of *his* settings of a
medieval carol that's *been* one of the most enduring of the species:
'In dulci júbilo' (in sweet rejoicing): I'll tell you the story of it later, one
of these December Sundays.

MUSIC: to end of same

KANE: Let's begin with some much *older* music, monastic chant for the pre-
Christmas season, 'Advent', meaning 'the Coming'. The *character* of
Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas Day, was (and still is)
one of longing and expectation for the coming of the Messiah. One of
the biblical images that recurs in the ecclesiastical chants is that of the
tree of Jesse. Here's an Advent responsary "Stirps Jesse". 'The root
of Jesse has produced a branch, and the branch a flower, and on that
flower the Spirit has rested. The virgin mother of God is the branch,
the flower, he Son. The monks of the Abbey of Ligugé in France sing
"Stirps Jesse"

MUSIC: Stirps Jesse 92 x 01 tr 2 3:05

KANE: From plainchant to something more grand. Writing cantatas for every
Sunday and major church festival of the year (and all that more than
just *once* around), Johann Sebastian Bach can justly claim more than
one spot in an Early Music series for Advent and Christmastime. It
might perhaps be more appropriate at this stage to choose one of his
Advent-Sunday cantatas, but I've taken instead the final chorus from
one of his Christmas Day offerings, BWV 63 "Christen, ätzt diesen
Tag", first heard in Halle around 1715 or so. The Bach Choir of
Bethlehem and the Bach Festival Orchestra conducted by Greg

Funfgeld sing "Höchster, schau in Gnaden an" 'Most High, look with mercy now at the warmth of reverent spirits'

MUSIC: "Höchster, schau in Gnaden an" 89 C 01 tr 16 6:53

KANE: The final chorus of one of J.S.Bach's cantatas for Christmas Day. St Nicholas, a 4th century bishop of Myra (in modern-day Turkey) became a well-known and widely-revered figure all over medieval Europe, east and west; many churches were dedicated to him, towns and territories put under his heavenly patronage, guilds and associations took him as their patron. To this day, Nicholas is still a name commonly enough used as a first-name, and the legends of his life are still remembered, however small the grain of historical fact that may lie behind them. They're documented in many hymns and verses built onto the official 10th century liturgical texts for his feast-day. His cult got a special impetus after his remains were "translated" (that's the official word for being transferred, or perhaps plain stolen) from Myra and brought to Bari in southern Italy by a group of Italian merchants in 1087. Nicholas' feast-day is 6th December, and as he's so closely related with this time of year, let's listen to two pieces from a collection of medieval chant and polyphony on his legends. The first is a short hymn cataloguing some of Nicholas' miracles: "Intonent hodie voces ecclesie" 'Let the voices of the church sing out today'. The words are new ones put to already existing music.

MUSIC: Intonent hodie Legends of St Nicholas tr 1 1:56

KANE: "Intonent hodie": some of the legend of St Nicholas.... But you may have recognised the *melody* as that of another medieval carol, "Personent Hodie", made popular in England through an arrangement of it by Gustav Holst. Also from England, in a 13th century manuscript is the plainchant base on which *this* motet in honour of St Nicholas is built: "Salve cleri speculum", 'Hail, mirror of the clergy, renowned priest'. It's sung by Anonymous 4

MUSIC: Salve cleri speculum Legends..... tr 15 3:04

KANE: 'May we, through Nicholas, be made citizens of the heavenly kingdom of God'. Known as Sinter Klaas to the early Dutch burghers of New York, St Nicholas eventually became, in the early 1800s, the gift-bearing Santa Claus. This year is the 3rd centenary of the death, in early 1704, of French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Because of that and his quite large output of music for Christmastime, I thought

to have him feature a couple of weeks in this series of Early Music programmes. (Besides, I *also* have a certain *professional* link with the man: think 'a church in Paris', if you're curious about that!).

Charpentier left 4 more or less similar "*Canticles* for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ" --- oratorio-style tellings of the Christmas story, with recitatives of the gospel accounts, songs of angels, choirs of shepherds, and a concluding song for soloist and choir. Here's part of the *second* of these Canticles, starting from the angel's words "Don't be afraid, shepherds", to the concluding song "Salve puerule" which in recent years has become a Christmas item in its own right.

MUSIC: In Nativitatem DNJC Canticum 96 X 03 tr 15, 17-18 [NB NOT 16] 11:17

KANE: From a Christmas canticle of Marc-Antoine Charpentier. I started this programme with a Bach organ setting of the famous medieval German carol, 'In dulci jubilo'. It's one of those melodies which *many* composers, especially German ones, have made arrangements of, both for voice and for instruments. Here's one by a man born almost exactly 100 years before Bach, in the place where that Bach Christmas chorus I played was first heard, and also Handel's birthplace, Halle, in Germany. Organist and composer Samuel Scheidt was best known in his lifetime for his vocal music. His "In dulci jubilo" is written for two choirs and two independent trumpets: it's sung and played here by the Ex Cathedral Chamber Choir and Baroque Orchestra, directed by Jeffrey Skidmore.

MUSIC: In dulci jubilo 98 X02 tr 15 3:49

KANE: 'In dulci jubilo' by Samuel Scheidt. The evocation of angels rejoicing brings us to another short piece inspired by the gospel story of the angels telling shepherds about the birth of the Christ. This is a much quieter offering, "Thus Angels Sung", four lines set to music in England by an exact contemporary of Samuel Scheidt, Orlando Gibbons. He was the greatest of the early *English* composers, particularly known for his madrigals, motets and rather 'grand' church music. Incidentally, Orlando's father, son and three brothers were all also musicians. "Thus angels sung and thus sing we: to God on high all glory be"

MUSIC: Thus Angels Sung 98 X 02 tr 12 1:21

KANE: Orlando Gibbons' "Thus angels sung". Still with angels and England,

the story of the angel *Gabriel* bringing news to the young virgin Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah. This is the Latin carol, “Angelus ad Virginem” which dates at least from the 1200s, and has been attributed to Philip the Chancellor who died in 1236. It’s actually mentioned in the famous 14th century middle-English epic poem “The Canterbury Tales” by Geoffrey Chaucer, as being sung by one of the characters in the wonderful (if a bit bawdy) story told by the pilgrim who was a miller. “Angelus ad Virginem” (‘the angel, coming secretly to the virgin’) is sung in this recording by soprano Emma Kirkby

MUSIC: Angelus ad Virginem ‘Adeste Fideles’ tr 13 3:44

KANE: The 700-year old carol, ‘Angelus ad Virginem’. We’ve had angels and some shepherds, and some music of Charpentier. *He* was a student of Giacomo Carissimi from whom he learnt about the oratorio and dialogue style that he used in his Christmas canticles. “O Anima Festina”, “Hasten, O soul, and be amazed in wonder’ is a song by Carissimi in a kind of conversation of the singer, his life, his soul and humanity, with the small child in the crib. It’s sung by soloists of the Netherlands Bach Society

MUSIC: O Anima Festina Angels & tr 17 7:00

KANE: “O Anima Festina”, by Carissimi, ending this first of a *series* of Early Music programmes focussed on the seasons of Advent and Christmastime. Next week, some Scarlatti, Buxtehude, Praetorius and Purcell. Good-bye for now.

MUSIC: Bach: In dulci jubilo CD 44909-00 1 tr 10 1:00

Music 42:44
Script-words 1267

Bach:	In dulci júbilo (BWV 608)	CD 44909-00 1	tr 10	1:00
Plainchant:	Stirps Jesse	92 x 01	tr 2	3:05
Bach:	“Höchster, schau in Gnaden an”	89 C 01	tr 16	6:53
Chant:	Intonent hodie	Legends of St Nicholas	tr 1	1:56
Chant:	Salve cleri speculum	Legends.....	tr 15	3:04
Charpentier:	In Nativitatem DNJC Canticum	96 X 03	tr 15, 17-18 [NB NOT 16]	11:17
Scheidt	In dulci júbilo	98 X02	tr 15	3:49
Gibbons :	Thus Angels Sung	98 X 02	tr 12	1:21
carol:	Angelus ad Virginem	‘Adeste Fideles’	tr 13	3:44
Carissimi	O Anima Festina	Angels &	tr 17	7:00