

Early Music Christmas

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 2
Sunday 12th December 2004

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MUSIC: Bach “In dulci júbilo” **CD 44909-00 1 tr. 10** **1:00**

KANE: Hello again, and welcome to more Early Music on the theme of
V.O. Christmastime. I'm Ciaran Kane, and today I've got another version of
Slow fade this carol “In dulci júbilo”, another piece of seasonal plainchant, and music of Scarlatti and Purcell. But first someone not at all so well known even by name --- the Frenchman Guillaume Bouzignac who was born around 1590. He has a delightful dramatic setting of the story of the angels announcing to shepherds the birth of Christ: “Noe, noe, Pastores cantate Domino canticum novem” ‘Noel, noel! Shepherds, sing to the Lord a new song’. A soprano takes the part of the angel Gabriel, in dialogue with the crowd of shepherds who keep asking questions: who ? where ? why ?. Then, at the end, ‘Thus they went in question and answer: to our new-born sun, Noel, Noel: to our dawn, Noel, Noel..... and at the very end a ‘noel’ also for King Louis! Bouzignac’s “Noé, noé, pastores”

MUSIC: Bouzignac: “Noe, Noe, pastores” **98 X 02 tr 3** **4:18**

KANE: Ex Cathedra Chamber choir and orchestra, with ‘Noé, Noé, Pastores” by Guillaume Bouzignac. In Germany, rather than such dramatisation of the gospel story, it was the form and old melodies of the carol that drew composers to make their own arrangements and settings. Besides the famous “In dulci júbilo” I’ve already mentioned a number of times, one of the favourites was the lovely text “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen” “A rose has sprung from a sweet root”. The imagery refers to the biblical Jesse and his tree: the rose, spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, is the one brought to us by the maiden Mary. Here’s the setting of “Es is ein Ros” by Michael Praetorius, an organist and prolific composer as well as an important musical historian whose life spanned the transition from the 16th to the 17th centuries. It’s sung by the Netherlands Bach Society.

MUSIC: Praetorius: “Es ist ein Ros” Angels & tr 2 2:54

KANE: Michael Praetorius’ version of the old German carol “Es ist ein Ros”. Henry Purcell, one of the greatest among English composers, died quite young but left a wide variety and quantity of music. He wrote operas, incidental music for the theatre, songs, keyboard and instrumental works, and in his last years a particular prolific flow of great church music. One of his finest anthems is the Christmas one written in 1687, “Behold I bring you glad tidings”. It’s written with orchestral accompaniment, for recitative, verse trio and full choir. Here it is, sung by the Heinrich Schütz choir directed by Roger Norrington.

MUSIC: Purcell : “Behold I bring you glad tidings” 90 X 13 tr2 10:13

KANE: The Christmas anthem of Henry Purcell, “Behold I bring you glad tidings”. Popular religion in 13th century Europe produced a kind of *parallel* to the ‘official’ plainchant of church services, free-flowing narrative of (for instance) the life of Christ, interpretation of the biblical prophecies of the Messiah, or prayer of intercession. The language was still often Latin, or the Latin that was *evolving* into the present-day Romance languages. Perhaps the Italian “laude” are the best-known samples, but similar songs come from France, Spain, Poland, the Czech territories. Here’s one from France, “Lux Optata Claruit”, ‘The longed-for light has shone out; rejoice, daughter of Zion.... The Messiah sent from heaven is born to die, to heal the world’

MUSIC: “Lux Optata Claruit” 94 X 04 tr 7 2:36

KANE: An anonymous 13th century French Christmas song. Back to more familiar territory next, with another version of that old German carol I began with, “In dulci jubilo”. Like a certain number of other carols of its time, it’s called “macaronic” because the words switch between Latin and (in this case) old German, line by line. Among many known composers who’ve made their own settings of it is Dietrich Buxtehude, the Danish organist and composer who influenced J.S.Bach so much. His fame as an organist drew Bach to walk the 200 miles from Arnstadt to Lübeck just to hear him play. Buxtehude also re-introduced at Lübeck an annual custom of giving evening concerts, in association with church services,

on the 5 Sundays before Christmas. His “In dulci jubilo” is a more reflective, lilting, version than most.

MUSIC: Buxtehude: “In dulci jubilo” 98 X 02 tr 17 7:00

KANE: Buxtehude’s “In dulci jubilo”. The third Sunday of Advent, second-last before Christmas Day, traditionally has been known as “Gaudete” Sunday. That’s because the first word of the liturgical texts for the day is “Gaudete”, meaning “Rejoice” --- it’s a quote from St Paul’s letter to the Christians of Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say Rejoice: the Lord is near”. On the modern-day ‘Advent wreath’ (as it’s called), one of the four candles is usually pink rather than purple, to denote this same Sunday. As the *plainchant* contribution to today’s programme, I’ve chosen the entrance song, or the “Introit” for Gaudete Sunday. The text also includes a usual psalm verse, this one: “You have blessed your land, O Lord, and overturned Jacob’s captivity”. Monks of the Abbey of Ligugé in France are the singers here.

MUSIC: ‘Gaudete’ 92 X 01 tr 5 3:36

KANE: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always’, sung by the monks of Ligugé Abbey. Small bagpipes and shepherds’ flutes feature a lot in ‘pastoral’ music for Christmastime, suggested no doubt by the gospel story of the shepherds at Bethlehem. And “pastoral” music, based on traditional melodies or composed for the occasion, became features of Baroque-era Christmas celebrations in Italy and in France, at court and in palaces, including episcopal ones. Entertainments were devised for the “gap” between the celebration of Vespers on Christmas Eve and the start of the Christmas Midnight Mass. Corelli’s well-known ‘Christmas Concerto’, written specifically for Christmas night, is one outstanding example. Another very attractive one is Alessandro Scarlatti’s ‘Cantata pastorale’ for the Nativity of Our Lord, titled “O di Betlemme Altera”. It’s been claimed as ‘the most charming of all Baroque representations of the shepherds at the manger’. It’s a long-ish work, so I’ve chosen just part of it, up to the end of the second aria. The singer is Deborah York with The King’s Consort, conducted by Robert King.

MUSIC: Scarlatti: O di Betlemme Altera 96 R 27 ttrr. 23 – 27 9:34

KANE: “He made everything from nothing, and yet I see him in the cradle, born

upon earth". The ending of the second aria from Alessandro Scarlatti's Christmas cantata "O di Betlemma Altera". A number of French organist-composers from the Baroque era onwards have made their own organ arrangements of many of the delightful old French 'noëls'. Among them, Michel-Richard de Lalande who, among other things, taught the daughters of King Louis XIV and held a number of court posts. He is perhaps better known for his more lavish court ballets and church music. I leave you today with two pieces from his collection of 'Symphonies for Christmas', arrangements of traditional French noëls which were performed in the royal chapel on Christmas Eve. These are "Or nous dites Marie" (Pray tell us, Mary), and "Noël cette journée" (This Christmas Day). Until next week, good-bye

MUSIC: de Lalande: Symphonies for Christmas CD 8449 ttrr 29-30 4:20

Music = 45:00

Script wordcount: 1112

Bouznac:	“Noe, Noe, pastores”	98 X 02	tr 3	4:18
Praetorius:	“Es ist ein Ros”	Angels &	tr 2	2:54
Purcell :	“Behold I bring you glad tidings”	90 X 13	tr2	10:13
Laude	“Lux Optata Claruit”	94 X 04	tr 7	2:36
Buxtehude:	“In dulci júbilo”	98 X 02	tr 17	7:00
Plainchant: :	‘Gaudete’	92 X 01	tr 5	3:36
Scarlatti:	O di Betlemme Altera	96 R 27	ttrr. 23 – 27	9:34
de Lalande:	Symphonies for Christmas	CD 8449	ttrr 29-30	4:20