

Early Music Christmas

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 3
Sunday 19th December 2004

=====

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

KANE: Hello again! I’m Ciaran Kane, and this is the *third* in a series of *four* Christmastime Early Music programmes on air each week at this time, **V.O. & slow out** this month. Like the previous weeks, there’s some plainchant, a different version of “In dulci jubilo”, something a bit longer, and something instrumental. Also a return to Charpentier with something written specifically for *this last week before* Christmas Day. The longer piece is from the famous “Historia” of the birth of Christ by Heinrich Schütz. But I’m starting with the jubilant setting by Schütz’s *teacher*, Giovanni Gabrieli, of a regular Christmastime text many composers have put music to: “O magnum mysterium” ‘O great wonder, miraculous sacrament: the beasts of the field have seen the Lord, new-born and lying in a manger’.

MUSIC: Gabrieli: O Magnum Mysterium 97 R 07 tr 5 3:45

KANE: “O Magnum Mysterium”, by Giovanni Gabrieli, sung by the monks and choirboys of Downside Abbey, in England. I promised you the legend of that old German carol “In dulci jubilo”. A 14th century German writer tells the story about a saintly mystic and spiritual writer, who died in 1366, the Blessed Henry Suso. One night Suso saw in a dream, or a vision, a group of angels dancing to a new carol tune and words. One of the angels came over to him, took him by the hand and led him into the group to join the dance. When he woke up, with the vision still fresh before him, he wrote down the music and the words he’d heard.... what we now know as “In dulci jubilo”, ‘In sweet rejoicing’. The carol became popular all over Europe, translated into various languages, often keeping the alternating Latin lines of the original. The prolific 19th century English translator, John Mason Neale, made the current English version of it, “Good Christian Men rejoice” ---- recently altered, I believe, in the interests of political correctness, to “Good Christian *Friends* rejoice”. Here’s the setting by Michael Praetorius.

MUSIC: Praetorius: “In dulci jubilo” 98 X 06 tr 1 3:08

KANE: The BBC Singers, with The Wallace Collection, conducted by Stephen Cleobury. For a traditional carol-type song this week, we stay in Germany, with “Es sungen drei Engel” ‘Three angels sang a sweet song that rang through the high heavens’, taken from a collection published in 1605. The arrangement, and the solo trumpet, are more modern: the singers with the Westminster Abbey Choir are Emma Kirkby, Mary Nichols and Michael Lees.

MUSIC: ‘Es sung drei Engel’ Adeste tr 4 3:40

KANE: ‘Three angels sang’. More angels, and shepherds too, in Heinrich Schütz’s “Historia der Geburt Jesu Christi”. Wise men, Herod, High-priests and Scribes all appear too, in the latter part of the work; but they’re in St *Matthew’s* gospel, and we’ll stop today with the end of St *Luke’s* account, with the *naming* of Jesus. Schütz’ “historia of the joyful and merciful birth of God and Mary’s Son, Jesus Christ” (to give the work its full title) was first heard at Christmas 1660, at vespers services in the court chapel of Dresden, when the composer was 75-years old. It was four *years* before a printed version appeared, and *that* only had the Evangelist’s part: it seems Schütz felt the rest of it wouldn’t achieve its proper effect anywhere else than in a court chapel! Wonder what he would have thought of recording and CDs. Here now is the first section of Schütz’ ‘historia’ of the birth of Christ.

**MUSIC: Schütz: Historia der Geburt Jesu Christi 97 R 53
tr 1 – 4 (to 3:33 ONLY) 12:24**

KANE: Kammerchor Stuttgart, under Frieder Bernius, with the first section of Heinrich Schütz’ Christmas ‘historia’. The opening words of the Christmas Day Mass are “Puer natus est nobis”, ‘A boy is born for us’. The Gregorian chant for it has been used as the base for other polyphonic compositions; and the words, in English at least, have been made very familiar by the great chorus in Handel’s “The Messiah”: “Unto us a child is born”. The text is actually from the Biblical prophecy of Isaiah, in Chapter 9 verse 6. “A child is born for us, a son is given to us; authority rests upon his shoulder, and he will be called Angel of great counsel”. This is the plainchant version.

MUSIC: Puer natus est nobis 92 X 01 tr 13 2:36

KANE: A feature of the week before Christmas, in the traditional prayer of the Christian church is a series of antiphons at evening prayers, known as the “O” antiphons. That’s simply because each of them begins with that exclamation, ‘O’, and a biblical image or name for God, like ‘Wisdom’, ‘Adonai’, ‘root of Jesse’, ‘King of the nations’. There are *seven* of them, all on the same pattern: a longing exclamation and invocation of an attribute of God, followed by the urgent appeal to “Come” and show that attribute in action among people. French composer Marc-Antoine Charpentier made a setting of these ‘O’ antiphons for Christmastime performance, interspersed with popular noëls. I’ve chosen just three of them: numbers 1, 4 and 5. ‘O Wisdom proceeding from the mouth of the Most High..... come and teach us’ ‘O Key of David... who opens and no-one can close.... come and break the bonds of those who lie captive....” “O Star of the morning.... come and shine upon those who sit in darkness”.

MUSIC: Charpentier: ‘O’ Antiphons 96 X 03 ttr 2, 6, 8 7:08

KANE: Three of the Advent ‘O’ antiphons, by Charpentier, sung by Les Arts Florissants directed by William Christie. The final ‘O’ antiphon, on Christmas Eve, is ‘O Emmanuel’: for completeness, let’s hear it in its brief Gregorian chant form. Incidentally, it’s also the origin of the popular song-carol of the season, ‘O Come, O come Emmanuel’

MUSIC: “O Emmanuel” 92 X 01 tr 10 0:45

KANE: Back to angels again: and to singers we heard earlier, *this* time with music from Spain, by the 17th century Catalan composer Joan Cererols: his dance-like villancico “Serafín, que con dulce harmonía” ‘Gentle seraphs, your sweet concords blending’ The last verse reads, in translation, ‘In this valley of woes, the fair Jasmine that grows among thorns is an emblem most true: Thriving still, ‘twill survive ev’ry ill, A sweet symbol of Hope that springs ever anew”.

MUSIC: Cererols: “Serafín, que con dulce harmonía” Adeste tr 8 5:18

KANE: That Catalan carol doesn’t feature in my next choice --- a *non-vocal* interlude which is a contemporary arrangement of a ‘Suite of Medieval Carols’, performed by the group Solid Brass, recorded in New York in 1989.

MUSIC: A Suite of Medieval Carols 89 C 01 tr 1 2:51

KANE: Christmas in St Mark's Basilica, Venice, was a really grand affair just 400 years ago. There's an extant description of the Midnight and Christmas Day Masses in St Mark's in 1607. The writer describes the choirs of instruments and of voices, the two organs and the glorious lighting. He doesn't say who the *music* was by: it could've been by any of the resident musicians at St Marks, who at that date included three Giovanni's --- Gabrieli, Croce, and Bassano. Bassano was in charge of the basilica's *instrumental* ensemble, and he also wrote a lively Christmas Day motet, "Hodie Christus natus est" 'Today Christ is born'. So, having begun with Gabrieli today, I leave you back in Venice, with Giovanni Bassano.

MUSIC: Bassano: "Hodie Christus natus est" 92 X 13 tr 3 2:29

KANE: The Monteverdi Choir and Philip Jones Brass Ensemble under John Eliot Gardiner performing Giovanni Bassano's "Hodie Christus natus est". And that's all for this week's Early Music Christmas, with me Ciaran Kane. Next week, some Bach, Charpentier again, Monteverdi and an Italian Abbess. Meanwhile, enjoy a happy and musical Christmas!

MUSIC (if needed) Bach: In dulci jubilo CD 44909-00 1 tr. 10 1:00

script wordcount: **1175**

music timing (excl.'sig.')

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Bach | “In dulci jubilo” | CD 44909-00 | 1 tr. 10 | 1:00 |
| Gabrieli: | O Magnum Mysterium | 97 R 07 | tr 5 | 3:45 |
| Praetorius: | “In dulci jubilo” | 98 X 06 | tr 1 | 3:08 |
| Carol: : | ‘Es sung drei Engel’ | Adeste | tr 4 | 3:40 |
| Schütz: | Historia der Geburt Jesu Christi | 97 R 53 | | |
| | | | tr 1 – 4 (to 3:33 ONLY) | 12:24 |
| Plainchant : | Puer natus est nobis | 92 X 01 | tr 13 | 2:36 |
| Charpentier: | ‘O’ Antiphons | 96 X 03 | ttrr 2, 6, 8 | 7:08 |
| Plainchant: | “O Emmanuel” | 92 X 01 | tr 10 | 0:45 |
| Cererols: | “Serafín, que con dulce harmonía” | Adeste | tr 8 | 5:18 |
| A Suite of Medieval Carols | | 89 C 01 | tr 1 | 2:51 |
| Bassano: | “Hodie Christus natus est” | 92 X 13 | tr 3 | 2:29 |