

Early Music: Easter & Beyond

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 3
Sunday 17th April 2005



MUSIC: Vivaldi --- Alleluia fr. Motet 98R05 // 8 2:30

KANE: Back to *Vivaldi* for *this* week's opening 'Alleluia', from one of his solo-voice motets. This is "Early Music" for Easter and beyond, and I'm your host for the next 50 minutes or so, Ciaran Kane. This week, most of the music is for the festival of Ascension. And I'm starting off with Orlando Gibbons, one of the most highly regarded musicians of his day in England. "O clap your hands together, all ye people" is a setting of the psalm most associated with Ascension Day, Ps 47. It's one of Gibbons' largest and most festive of anthems, and was first performed in 1622 at a ceremony in Oxford when Gibbons received his Doctor of Music degree. Here it's sung by the Oxford Camerata with Jeremy Summerly

MUSIC: Gibbons ----- O Clap your Hands 96R29 // 1 5:05

KANE: "O clap your Hands": a setting by Orlando Gibbons of Psalm 47, the Ascension Day psalm. Next, *another* English composer, Peter Philips and *his* setting of that *same* psalm, but in latin and just two verses of it, "Ascendit Deus" (God goes up amid jubilation, and the Lord at the sound of the trumpet, Alleluia). Philips was a contemporary of Gibbons, one of a small group of expatriate English composers working on the European continent. He'd been a choirboy at St Paul's, London, but left England at the age of about twenty, spent some years in Rome, travelled widely in Europe as a musician, before settling in Antwerp. In 1597 he entered the Chapel Royal of the Archduke Albert in Brussels, and stayed on there as one of three chapel organists. His music was published mostly in Antwerp over a period of about 15 years. The choir in this recording is that of Westminster Cathedral, London, under James O'Donnell.

MUSIC: Philips --- Ascendit Deus CD 32683 // 7 2:58

KANE: “Ascendit Deus”, from Ps 47, a motet for the Feast of Ascension, by Peter Philips. Another expatriate English composer, a generation younger than Philips, was Richard Dering who visited Italy in his early 30s, some time later was organist for the community of English Benedictine nuns in Brussels, and then returned to England as organist to the Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria. His motets were said to be Oliver Cromwell’s favourite music. Dering’s setting of “Ave Verum” was seemingly written in Rome, and published in 1617 in Antwerp while he was working in Brussels. This is the choir of King’s College, Cambridge.

MUSIC: Dering --- Ave Verum 93R07 // 6 3:40

KANE: “Ave Verum” by Richard Dering. There’s *another* text for the same festival (Corpus Christi), that’s not at *all* as well known, the antiphon “O Sacrum Convivium” (O sacred banquet). Best-known *today* is probably the setting by 20th century French composer Olivier Messiaen. It’s *his* only a-cappella motet, and it *does* get performed in concerts and has been recorded often enough. But for an ‘early music’ version, here’s one for five voices by yet another Englishman, Thomas Tallis. In his 16th century lifetime, the turbulent years of religious changes in England under four different monarchs, meant that he had to write for both Latin liturgies and English vernacular services, and sometime both languages at the same time. Here’s the choir of Winchester Cathedral, singing Thomas Tallis’ “O Sacrum Convivium” (O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of His passion recalled, our minds filled with grace, and we’re given a pledge of future glory).

MUSIC: Tallis --- O Sacrum Convivium 93R11 // 7 4:19

KANE: The quiet, reflective “O Sacrum Convivium” of Thomas Tallis. To Italy, Germany, Austria and Spain for the rest of this week’s ‘Early

Music for Easter and beyond': *Venice*, first, for a Pentecost motet of Giovanni Gabrieli, "Hodie completi sunt" (Today is Pentecost, alleluia; today the Holy Spirit has appeared to the disciples in the form of fire). Gabrieli evidently enjoyed antiphonal effects and contrasts in the reverberating Basilica of St Mark's, as well as complex counterpoint, and making abrupt changes of movement. In "Hodie completi sunt" there are two four-voice choirs, here sung by The Sixteen.

MUSIC: Gabrieli --- Hodie completi sunt 98R45 // 7 3:39

KANE: Giovanni Gabrieli's Pentecost motet, "Hodie completi sunt dies Pentecostes, alleluia". That's about 400 years old, but my next choice today is over 800 years old, from the pen and inspiration of a truly extraordinary lady, poet, visionary, musician, naturalist, diplomat, playwright, the Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, a town on the Rhine river in Germany. Among her many songs, hymns and sequences (some quite long and complex) is this one dedicated to the Holy Spirit "O Ignis Spiritus Paracliti" (O fire of the comforting Spirit). It's sung here by three tenors of the group Gothic Voices

MUSIC: Hildegard of Bingen 90R05 // 3 4:48

KANE: "O ignis Spiritus" (O fire of the Spirit), a hymn to the Holy Spirit by the 12th century German mystic, Hildegard of Bingen. A couple of weeks ago I introduced the "Mystery Sonatas" or "rosary sonatas" of Austrian composer Heinrich von Biber. These are solo violin sonatas each one focussed on one of the 15 mysteries of the Rosary prayer, a kind of contemplative reflection on the gospel or scriptural words on which each 'mystery' is based. Each sonata also has its own special tuning of the violin strings, *not* the standard G.D.A.E arrangement. In the group of sonatas devoted to what are called the five "glorious" mysteries the tuning is particularly sonorous (unlike in the 'sorrowful' mysteries). The sonata no.12, The Ascension, is tuned so that in its 2nd movement aria the violin can imitate a choir of trumpets. Here's that 'Ascension' sonata, with violinist Walter Reiter and harpsicord, cello and theorbo.

MUSIC: Biber --- Mystery Sonatas no. 12 CIGCD021(2) // 6 – 9 6:47

KANE: No.12, The Ascension, of Heinrich von Biber's 'Mystery' or 'Rosary' Sonatas. The soloist in that recording, Walter Reiter, suggests that the listener should *read* the relevant scripture passage (the references are given in the CD booklet) before listening to each of these sonatas, both (he says) "to set the scene literally and perhaps even to experience.....something of the awe that Biber would have wanted his public to feel." There's only a *handful* now left in liturgical use of the so-called "sequence"-hymns or *prosa* that were once so numerous (and a majority of these occur between Easter and Corpus Christi). Here's a dis-continued one for Ascension Day that starts with the same words of Ps 47, 'Clap your hands, all you people', and is a kind of paraphrase and symbolic meditation on the scriptural account of the Ascension. It sounds quite *like* the still-in-use Pentecost one, "Veni Sancte Spiritus", with similar antiphonal melody-repetitions.

MUSIC: Gregorian Sequence --- Omnes Gentes Plaudite 90R07 // 8 4:01

KANE: A Gregorian Chant Sequence-hymn for Ascension, "Omnes Gentes Plaudite" Finally today, Spanish master-composer Tomas Luis de Victoria, who was sent to Rome to study at the age of 17, there met his great Roman contemporary Palestrina and many other musicians from all over Europe, and had great success before finally returning to Madrid. His Ascension Day motet "Ascendens Christus in Altum" was first published in Rome in 1572 (and 4 times more during his lifetime). Like he did with *other* motets, Victoria later wrote a Mass based on this. From his "Missa Ascendens Christus in altum", this is the Credo, sung by the choir of Westminster Cathedral, London, under David Hill. And it takes us to the end of today's "Early Music".

MUSIC: Victoria --- Missa Ascendens Christus CD 3945 // 11 5:55

Music timing: 43:42
Text wordcount: 1161