

Early Music for Lent & Easter

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 4
Sunday 27th March 2005

MUSIC: Sheppard --- Haec Dies 90R04 tr 8 1:59

KANE: “This day the Lord has made” “Haec dies quam fecit Dominus”, an Easter Day antiphon, opening the *Easter* edition of Early Music for Lent and Easter, with me, Ciaran Kane. Welcome now to some 50 minutes of music, both instrumental and vocal for this day. Just now you heard John Sheppard, a contemporary in England of Thomas Tallis and other ‘greats’ of the 16th century. Sheppard’s music has mainly survived in just one manuscript anthology, and *that* doesn’t have all the complete parts. So it’s remained largely unknown, and it’s only since the 1970s that it’s begun to appear in print. “Haec Dies” is one of his small gems; the text is actually a psalm-quotation, and used in the liturgy of Easter Sunday and throughout the Easter season. But of course “Alleluia”, (Praise the Lord), is *the* Easter word in church liturgy. Before the proclamation of the gospel on Easter morning, it’s chanted with a verse, and followed by what’s now one of the few remaining “Sequence” hymns, the beautiful narrative gregorian chant hymn, “Victimae paschali laudes” (‘Praise to the paschal victim’) The *melody* of this has found its way into quite a *number* of more modern-day compositions both religious and secular. Here’s both the “Alleluia, Pascha nostrum” and the “Victimae paschali” sung by the monks of the Benedictine Downside Abbey near Bath in England.

MUSIC: Gregorian chant ---- Pascha nostrum + Victimae.. 97R07 tr 11 3:57

KANE: That old plainchant hymn uses a rather short narrative and a brief dialogue to tell the story of Jesus’ resurrection, and invite praise and worship. More or less the same ingredients that you find in later church dramas or Easter entertainments, and then later still in cantatas or ‘historias’ on the resurrection. Like the famous Heinrich Schütz “historia” which dates from 1623, with the full title “Historia of

the Joyous and Victorious Resurrection of our only Redeemer and Benefactor, Jesus Christ". It was written to replace an *older* Easter historia by a predecessor of Schütz as music director at the court of Dresden, and Schütz in fact took both the text and some elements of the musical setting *from* that version, while adding his own innovations. But he didn't consider the Easter historia as a work to be staged: rather, it was an effort to present the gospels in a lively manner. He stipulated that the singer of the Evangelist part should be standing in full view, with the other characters *not* visible. I've chosen the section about Jesus' appearance to the two disciples at Emmaus. It's based on the gospel of St Luke, ch.24 and performed here by Kammerchor Stuttgart, Musica Fiata Köln, and Barockorchester Stuttgart directed by Frieder Bernius.

MUSIC: Schütz --- Historia der Auferstehung Jesu Christi 97R53 tr 17 9:14

[NB: extremely short gap before track 18]

KANE: From Heinrich Schütz' Easter Historia. The 12th century liturgical drama from which my *next* selection comes has that same Emmaus story as its centre-piece, 'The Play of the Pilgrims to Emmaus'. This originated in Normandy, and was usually performed as part of the church service at the end of Vespers of Easter Day. It involved the procession to the baptismal font where the response "Haec Dies" would've been sung. There are three "scenes" in the pilgrimage liturgy drama, the appearance of Christ to the Emmaus pilgrims, His appearance to Mary Magdalene, and His appearance to St Thomas who'd missed out on the first announcement of the resurrection and refused to believe it unless he could himself touch Jesus. This Thomas story is the one I've chosen: you hear the dialogue of Christ with Thomas, and then the concluding chorus of the episode, "Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro" (The Lord is risen from the tomb, even he who was hung upon the cross for us). An antiphon "Ego sum Alpha et Omega" (I am the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end) leads into the procession back to the altar. Ensemble Organum with Marcel Péres are the singer/performers.

MUSIC: Le Jeu des Pelerins d'Emmaus 91R11 ttrr 11 – 12 5:24

KANE: From the medieval play of the pilgrims to Emmaus. From one kind of mystery to another, and to the only *non*-vocal item in this whole series of music for Lent and Easter.... One of the “mystery” *sonatas* of Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber. This set of 15 violin and continuo sonatas is now Biber’s best-known work, though it was never printed in his own lifetime and remained unknown until it was published just a hundred years ago, in 1905. It’s dedicated to Maximilian Gandolph, Archbishop of Salzburg who was Biber’s employer for the last 30 or so years of his life. And the dedication ends with the words: “I have consecrated the whole to the honour of the 15 Sacred Mysteries which you promote so strongly”. Hence the title ‘Mystery Sonatas’, in the absence of a title by the composer himself (a title-page is missing in the only manuscript source). The ‘sacred mysteries’ referred to are the 15 meditations on events in the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary, divided into three cycles of 5 each, accompanied by recitation of the Lord’s prayer and repeated “Ave Marias”, more commonly known as the “Rosary”.....hence also the *alternate* title “Rosary Sonatas” for these works. A special feature of these sonatas is that Biber uses ‘scordatura’, *tuning* the violin strings to a different set of notes for each sonata. This changes the sonorities of the instrument, makes it easier to play chords in a particular key, and affects the *mood* of a piece. While not ‘programme music’, the sonatas are more mystical tone-poems seeking to express in sound the essence of each Mystery. Sonata no. 11, ‘The Resurrection’, has in its centre the Easter plainsong hymn “Surrexit Christus hodie” (Christ rose today), and *may* be the same work as a contemporary inventory listing of a “Sonata Paschalis, Surrexit Christus Hodie” Walter Reiter is the soloist here, with the group ‘Cordaria’

MUSIC: Biber ---- Mystery Sonatas no. 11 SIGCD021 disc 2 tr 5 10:45

KANE: No. 11, ‘The Resurrection’, from the 15 ‘Rosary Sonatas’ of Heinrich von Biber. Back to perhaps more familiar ground next, an Easter Day cantata by George Phillip Telemann, “Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg” (Death is swallowed up in victory). This is from the annual sequence of Sunday cantatas that Telemann wrote for first performance in Frankfurt in the 1720 – 21 year. The poetry text is by

Gottfried Simonis, who wasn't much known before this date. In keeping with the festival, the cantata is orchestrated on a grand scale and begins with a magnificent introductory chorus that carries the work's title: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. Death where is thy sting ? Grave where is thy victory ? -- words from ch 15 of St Paul's first letter to the Christians of Corinth. We'll hear this and the following tenor recitative (So joyfully does my soul sing today), and the tenor and bass duet "Alleluia be sung, my Jesus, to you".

MUSIC: Telemann --- Der Tod ist verschlungen..... 98R22 ttrr 17-19 7:42

KANE: The opening sections of Telemann's Easter Day cantata, 'Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg' Finally, in this Early Music series of music for Lent and Easter, another Easter Day antiphon, one of William Byrd's latin liturgical pieces, probably written early in his career, though only published in 1605 "Christus resurgens" (Christ rising from the dead now dies no more). The tenor line is a slow plainchant melody, of a style that went out of favour after the Reformation in England when plainchant itself was abandoned. And with this 400-year-old music, I'll say good-bye for now and thank you for listening to Early Music for Lent and Easter.

MUSIC: Byrd --- Christus resurgens 90R03 tr 13 4:10

Music items timing: 43:11

Text word-count: 1227