

Early Music: Poems, Pilgrims and Parodies --- 1

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 1
Sunday 1st April 2007

MUSIC: Bach: Jesu meine Freude 96R06 # 6 fade-out at... 0:40

KANE: Hello again! I'm Ciaran Kane; and this month I'm presenting another new series of "Early Music" programmes, this time with the sub-title "Poems, Pilgrims and Parodies". That'll give you some indication of the *kind* of music I've chosen. It's mostly religious or 'church' music, which (for the earlier times, at least) survived the centuries better than its secular counterparts because it enjoyed official status and an organised preservation structure. I'm using the terms "poems, pilgrims and parodies" in a not *too*-literal sense. And of course in any case the word "parody" is very much a misnomer in the way it's used for early-music settings of the Mass. All it means in *that* context is *borrowing* a melody/theme from another musical setting and building on it. The original might have been a motet, a responsorial, or just a popular song of the day. And it's *such* a piece that I'm starting off with today, part of a Mass entitled "Sur le pont d'Avignon" (on the bridge at Avignon). You may recognise the *name*: but, sorry to disappoint you, it's a *different* melody from the one of the *same* name that's still sung today. The composer here is one Pierre Certon who was choir-master of the Saint-Chapelle in Paris and quite *prolific* a composer: he died in 1572. We'll hear the opening Kyrie and the Gloria.

MUSIC: Certon: Missa "Sur le pont d'Avignon" 98R41 ##1, 2 7:13

KANE: The choir of St Ignatius of Antioch, New York City, conducted by Harold Chaney, in the first two movements of the so-called 'parody' Mass, "Sur le pont d'Avignon" by Pierre Certon. If 'parody' is a misnomer, I must also admit to stretching the meaning of "pilgrims" in the sub-title I've given to this series of Early Music programmes. What I have next is not so much a *pilgrimage* song as a *processional* hymn sung in Holy Week

commemorating Christ's entry into Jerusalem before His passion. "Vexilla Regis" (the banners of the king go forth) is one of the greatest old Latin church hymns, written by the 6th century poet Venantius Fortunatus. He was asked to write it by Queen Radegunda, to welcome the arrival in Poitiers, France, where she had retired to a convent, of a large relic of the true cross being sent to her by the Emperor Justin II and Empress Sophia. The setting of 'Vexilla Regis' I've got for you is in four voices, one of two versions written by the great late-16th century Spanish composer Tomás Luis de Victoria. This arrangement of it was made by his 20th-century fellow-countryman, Manuel de Falla (and he termed it "a revision and expressive interpretation").

MUSIC: Victoria: "Vexilla Regis prodeunt" CD 20456 # 2 10:01

KANE: Hymn in honour of the cross, 'Vexilla regis prodeunt', in a setting by Tomás Luis de Victoria. Orlando Gibbons, born a generation after our first two composers of today, was one of the most highly-regarded English musicians of his time. He became organist of the Chapel Royal and then of Westminster Abbey, but as a composer his output was rather small, mostly church music and keyboard works. He left just 10 verse anthems (and this fits under the label of 'poems'): one of them is "Great Lord of Lords", written in 1617 for a visit to Scotland by King James I. It's sung here by the Oxford Camerata, under the direction of Jeremy Summerly.

MUSIC: Gibbons: 'Great Lord of Lords' 96R29 #2 4:50

KANE: Orlando Gibbons' verse anthem "Great Lord of Lords". Let's stay with Gibbons for a moment, to hear one of his organ preludes, which was published four or five years before that anthem: it's a brilliant little piece, calling for great finger agility. Prelude in G is played here by Laurence Cummings.

KANE: From England back to Spain again; and this time it's real pilgrims rather than a procession into church. Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain was the great pilgrimage destination for much of western Europe throughout the Middle Ages, especially in the 12th century. In recent years, walking the Camino de Santiago has again become a popular summertime activity not only for people with a religious purpose but for walkers and tourists of all kinds. So much so, you're advised *not* to try to get to Compostela for the Feast of St James at the end of July. Recent research has also led to the rediscovery of music and song associated with the pilgrim routes and for the celebration of St James' festival day. An antiphon to go with the singing of the 'Magnificat' canticle at Vespers addresses St James as "Lux et decus Hyspanie" (O light and glory of Spain, most venerable James, you who are pre-eminent among the apostles). Here it is, sung by the ensemble Organum.

MUSIC: Compostela: ad vespas Sancti Jacobi AMB 9966 # 10 3:41

KANE: From the Vespers of the feast of St James, at Compostela in Spain, in the high Middle Ages. Forward, next, to the baroque age, in France, and a setting of one of the most widely known religious poems, (and it *is* strictly a *poem* rather than a hymn), coming from the Franciscan devotional movement of the 13th century. The 20 stanza 3-line verses of "Stabat Mater Dolorosa", have been attributed to different authors but mostly to a monk, Jacopone da Todi. It's inspired by the prophecy in the gospel of Luke that a sword would pierce the heart of Mary, Jesus' mother. Incidentally, there's another, much *less* well known *parallel* poem, from the 15th century, "Stabat Mater Speciosa", about the joys of Mary at the birth of Jesus. It seems over 200 different settings of "Stabat Mater" have been recorded on CD alone, and something like 400 other versions have been documented. My choice of composer today is the long-lived Sebastien de Brossard, well-known in his own day which was between 1655 and 1730. His 'Stabat Mater' was published in 1702,

when Bach and Handel were both about 17, respectively a chorister at St Michael's Church, Lüneburg, and having just switched from law to music at Halle University. Because of its length, here's just the first eleven stanzas of Brossard's 'Stabat Mater', sung with the *French* pronunciation of the latin text, by Les Pages et les Chantres de la Chapelle, accompanied by Le Mercure Galant.

MUSIC: Brossard: 'Stabat Mater' 98R09 # 1 (up to v.11) 10:56

KANE: "Holy Mother grant me this: plant the wounds of Him who's crucified, firmly in my heart" --- verse 11 of 'Stabat Mater', in the music of Sebastien de Brossard. To finish out our programme today, we've just time enough for a short prayer which is actually a verse taken from an old latin Christmas hymn: 'Maria mater gratiae' (Mary, mother of grace, protect us from the enemy). The setting is by Carlo Gesualdo, a 16th century Neopolitan composer who was a nephew of the famous Cardinal Borromeo. The Tallis Scholars are directed by Peter Phillips.

MUSIC: Gesualdo: 'Maria mater gratiae' 94R03 # 13 3:36

KANE: A pious prayer by Carlo Gesualdo, famous in his day not only for his music but for an unstable temperament and for murdering his first wife and her lover in 1590. More early music, but without any scandals, next week at the same time. Good bye till then.

MUSIC: (if needed) As intro. Fill to 52:00

Music timings: 41:38

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