

Early Music: Poems, Pilgrims and Parodies --- 4

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 4
Sunday 22nd April 2007

MUSIC: Bach: Jesu meine Freude 96R06 # 6 0:40

KANE: Surely one of his best-loved, best-known chorales, J.S.Bach's "Jesu meine Freude" 'Jesu my joy', introducing another in this short season of Early Music chosen round the themes of poems, pilgrims and parodies. And Bach's homeland is the source for a *couple* of today's items, specifically from along the great Rhine river. Bingen is one of its towns, maybe now best known around the world for the extraordinary Abbess who presided over the convent-abbey she established there in the 12th century. Hildegard's visions and theological writings earned her the title of "Sybil of the Rhine": she was knowledgeable in natural sciences and in the medicinal properties of herbs and plants and trees; she was consulted by, and became an adviser to bishops, popes and kings; a pioneer in so many fields. Music was specially important to Hildegard in her direction and development of her religious community, and not only for their prayer and worship. And she's the first composer whose biography is known. She wrote many hymns and sequences for festival days and in honour of various saints and of the Mother of Jesus. "O viridissima virga" (O greenest of branches) is a hymn where Hildegard elaborates on the image of Mary as the biblical branch of Jesse, and her fertility as bringing new life to the natural world and bringing humankind to God. It's sung here by members of 'Gothic Voices'

MUSIC: Hildegard of Bingen: O viridissima virga 90R05 # 6 3:08

KANE: A hymn of Hildegard of Bingen, "O viridissima virga", about Mary as the branch of Jesse. Later in the programme, one of her longer sequence-poems, also with great richness of imagery. But let's now go to Venice some 500 years after Hildegard's time, to hear another poem, this one set to music by Vivaldi as his motet: "Clarae stellae Scintillate" 'Bright

stars, shine! ‘ It was written for the festival of Mary’s Visitation, 2nd July, probably 1715. By this time, latin poetical texts had deteriorated so much that a contemporary French traveller referred to them as a ‘rhyming hotch-potch of Latin words, in which barbarisms and solecisms are more frequent than sense and reason’. Counter-tenor James Bowman sings “Clarae Stellae” with The King’s Consort.

MUSIC: Vivaldi : “Clarae Stellae Scintillate” 98R05 ## 9 – 12 10:49

KANE: Vivaldi’s motet ‘Clarae Stellae Scintillate’. The so-called ‘parody’ Mass I’ve chosen for today is based on a setting of the *biblical* text, a quote from the Song of Songs, “I am the flower of the field”, ‘Ego flos Campi’. Monteverdi, Alonso Lobo and Clemens Non Papa all made settings of those few lines; but it’s not known what or whose the model was for the *Missa* ‘Ego Flos Campi’ by Juan Gutierrez de Padilla. de Padilla was born in Spain but moved to Mexico at the age of 32, and became maestro de capilla at Puebla Cathedral for his last 35 years. Here’s the Credo, and Sanctus-Benedictus from his *Missa Ego Flos Campi*.

MUSIC: Juan Gutierrez de Padilla : Missa Ego Flos Campi CDA 67380 ##5, 7 8:04

KANE: From *Missa Ego Flos Campi*, from mid-17th century Mexico, quite a bit before Vivaldi’s time. You heard *Ex Cathedra*, conducted by Jeffrey Skidmore. I don’t have any ‘proper’ pilgrimage or pilgrim this week, but something about St Nicholas and St Ursula instead. Nicholas was bishop of Myra (in modern Turkey) in the 4th century, and that’s about all the hard facts about him. But there’s lots of colourful and detailed legends about his life, including a pilgrimage he made to Egypt and Palestine as a young man. Nicholas became the most popular saint in both eastern and western Christendom. By the mid 7th century, shrines to him began to appear in western Europe. But what really spurred the spread of his cult was the 1087 hijacking of his remains from Myra to the Italian town of Bari, by a group of Italian businessmen who thought that would bring them good fortune. His reputation as preserver of ships and of sailors

made him popular in seafaring places like Holland, Normandy and the river towns of Germany. And, of course, Nicholas survived to become the ‘Santa Claus’ of the modern commercial season that happens near the end of the year, which it’s not now politically correct to name publicly. With the wide spread of his cult, there also came songs, hymns, poems and other liturgical texts. From those, here’s a poem that was likely to’ve been used as a *processional* song (a *kind* of pilgrimage, if you like):
“Cantu mirro, summa laude” ‘With wondrous song and highest praise’,
recounting some of Nicholas’ legendary miracles. It’s sung by
Anonymous 4

MUSIC: Legends of St Nicholas: Cantu mirro HMU 907232 # 6 4:49

KANE: There’s an old English song about St Nicholas, claimed to be one of the oldest in the language. It’s by English mystic Godric of Yorkshire, who was a close contemporary of Hildegard of Bingen and like her was said to’ve learnt his songs in heavenly visions. “Saint Nicholas, God’s beloved, graciously make beautiful dwelling places for us. Through your birth, through your bier, St Nicholas bring us safely there”.

MUSIC: Legends of St Nicholas: Sainte Nicholaes HMU 907232 # 12 1:12

KANE: Anonymous 4, singing of St Nicholas. Back to the Rhine again, and some very different Rhine maidens from those in Wagner’s operas. This is the story of St Ursula and the 11,000 virgins supposedly martyred at Cologne. The basis of the extended and complicated legends is an ancient stone inscription in the church of St Ursula in Cologne. This has its own ambiguities, but it testifies to the quite early martyrdom there of a group of virgins, variously numbered as five, or eight or eleven. The fabulous details of Ursula and 11,000 companions come from much later, around the 10th century. As the legends developed, Ursula was the daughter of an English Christian king, betrothed to a pagan prince whom she didn’t want to marry. On pretext of wanting to go on pilgrimage, she got her father’s permission to delay the wedding; then set sail for three

years in a ship carrying a thousand virgin companions, accompanied by ten other ships each carry a noble virgin with a thousand companions each. They completed a pilgrimage to Rome, and returning to Britain sailed up the Rhine to Cologne where they were martyred by the Huns when Ursula refused to marry their chief. The story was a very popular one, and inspired Hildegard of Bingen to write a number of poems, hymns and responsories for celebrating their September festival day. Two complementary sequence-hymns “O Ecclesia” and “Cum vox sanguinis Ursule” tell, in mystical and symbolic language, the story of Ursula’s martyrdom and apotheosis in heaven. The second of them begins: “When the voice of the blood of Ursula and of her innocent band resounded before the throne of God..”

MUSIC: Hildegard of Bingen: Cum vox sanguinis Ursule HMC 901626 # 18 10:38

KANE: Ensemble Organum, under Marcel Peres, singing “Cum vox sanguinis Ursule”. And finally today, let’s go back to 17th century Mexico, and finish with the ‘Gloria’ from that Missa ‘Ego Flos Campi’ by Juan Gutierrez de Padilla. Next week, England, Italy, Portugal, and Mexico again: not world cup soccer but Early Music in poems, pilgrims and parodies.

MUSIC; Juan Gutierrez de Padilla: Gloria CDA 67380 # 3 3:35
[prefade for 52:00 ending]

Music timings: 42:52

Text wordcount 1137