

Early Music: Poems, Pilgrims and Parodies --- 5

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 5
Sunday 29th April 2007

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

KANE: Hello once more ! and welcome to the *final* programme in this short series of Early Music, based on poems, pilgrims and parodies. I'm Ciaran Kane, your host and compiler for the past few weeks. The parody this week is English, and the pilgrims are going to Bethlehem. But we start with the poem, which is one of the greatest works of medieval latin poetry, well-known even to today by its *title* and even by the early *chant* the title-words are sung to. The plainsong first eight notes of “Dies Irae” must surely be the most quoted musical phrase of all time: apart from its place in the numerous settings of the whole Requiem, it appears in *many* symphonies, songs, occasional pieces, movie-scores (including, might I say, the 1941 Orson Welles classic “Citizen Kane”). The poem itself is an extraordinarily well-crafted, compact, complex and expressive piece of latin poetry-writing; so much so that it's almost impossible to translate satisfactorily --- in English alone there have been hundreds of published attempts at it. As one critic wrote, if you want to understand it, learn latin ! The poem dates from the 13th century, and is usually attributed to Thomas of Celano, who was a Franciscan friar, colleague, friend and biographer of St Francis of Assisi. Its title and first few verses are inspired by the biblical description of judgement day, from chapter one of the prophecy of Zephaniah. After that, it moves into a pleading prayer for mercy and forgiveness, and ends in an expression of deep personal devotion. “Dies Irae” was not incorporated into the texts of the Requiem until some 200 years after it was written, and its first appearance in a *polyphonic* setting was around 1500. The better-known, *dramatic* and concert settings of “Dies Irae” date from Mozart up to the early 20th century. More recent Requiems (like those of Andrew Lloyd-Webber and Karl Jenkins) either omit the poem entirely or use only part of it. The version of it I've chosen today is late Baroque, 1767, by Italian composer

Francesco Brusa, who started off as an organist at St Mark's, Venice, and ended his career as maestro di coro at one of the famous Ospedali of that city. From his setting of the Requiem Mass, here's the Dies Irae section, sung (as it may well have originally been) by women's voices.

MUSIC: Brusa : Missa pro Defunctis -- Sequentia SFGC 9801 ## 25 – 29 9:35

KANE: The San Francisco Girls Chorus singing the Sequence-poem, Dies Irae, from the Missa Pro Defunctis of Venetian Francesco Brusa. To follow that, music from over 100 years earlier and from Latin America. It's another poem, in the language of the Inca people, and comes from a *ritual* book produced by another Franciscan friar in Cuzco, Peru, Juan Perez Bocanegra. Published in 1631, it's the first *polyphony* to appear in the Americas. The piece is marked "to be sung in processions as they enter their churches". "Hanaq pachap kusikuynin", 'The Bliss of Heaven', is sung by Ex Cathedra, under Jeffrey Skidmore

MUSIC: "Hanaq pachap kusikuynin" CDA 67380 # 1 4:00

KANE: A church processional song from Latin America in the 17th century. It could perhaps also count as a *pilgrim* contribution to today's programme. But I've something else for you under *that* rubric. Making a pilgrimage to Bethlehem or the Holy Land is something people have been doing since the early centuries of Christianity, up to today. Dangers and difficulties along the way, whether by sea or land, varied over time. In particular, the land route from, say, England or France through eastern Europe and the Balkans and down into Turkey brought the western pilgrim into contact with cultures and customs unknown to him, and with the religion of Islam. Music and song *could* make up for the lack of a common language on the road, and even instruments had some close counterparts. From carols to folk-song, here's a sample of what a medieval traveller might have heard: first, a Croatian carol

MUSIC: On the Way to Bethlehem 96X02 # 7 3:56

KANE: A carol from Croatia. Travelling further south-east, on the way to Turkey and then the Holy Land, a traditional melody from Macedonia.

MUSIC: s a m e # 3 3:13

KANE: Two items of traditional music and song that medieval pilgrims to Bethlehem might have heard on their way. To England next, and yet another poem, one that's also an acrostic --- reading down the page, the first letter of each line spells out (in latin) "Elizabeth queen of England". The queen in question was Elizabeth of York, wife of King Henry 7th, mother of Henry 8th. She's recorded as paying the composer Robert Fayrfax the sum of 20 shillings for a setting of an anthem of our Lady and St Elizabeth, in March 1502. The text gives great play on the name Elizabeth; and introduces a whole *host* of other exotic names, all connecting together with Jesus and His mother Mary, her mother Anne, and her cousin Elizabeth and *her* son John the Baptist. It's a rather curious and contrived genealogy of Jesus, emphasising the female line. Here is "Eterne Laudis Liliu", sung by The Cardinal's Musick, directed by Andrew Carwood.

MUSIC: Robert Fayrfax: Eterne Laudis Liliu 98R02 # 8 10:48

KANE: "Eterne Laudis Liliu" by Robert Fayrfax, from 1502. A propos of that *ending*, someone's said that, what with Fayrfax and the end of Handel's Messiah, and others before and since, nobody does "Amen's" quite like the Brits. While on the European continent it had become a common practice to base Mass settings on existing melodies, including those of popular songs, the only *English* surviving examples of that practice are all based on one song: the so-call "Western Wind" Masses of Taverner, Tye and Sheppard. They all seem based on a development of the original song, "Westron wynd when wyll thou blow", which is preserved in a court manuscript.

MUSIC: Western Wynde BB0023741 # 2 STOP AT.... 0:45

KANE: English ‘parody’ Mass-settings have other peculiarities too: the Kyrie was omitted, and the remaining sections combined or truncated to produce three ‘movements’ balanced in length and weight. So, bits got left out of the Creed, and the Sanctus and Agnus Dei got combined and extended by less syllabic writing, while the Gloria was more or less straightforward. Here now is the Gloria, from the Western Wynde Mass of John Taverner, whose musical career became blighted by some of the politics of the Reformation under King Henry 8th. It’s sung by the Tallis Scholars.

MUSIC: s a m e starting from 0:51 7:15

KANE: The ‘Gloria’ from the Western Wind Mass of John Taverner. And finally, our musical pilgrimage takes us to northern Portugal and the famed monastery of Santa Cruz at Coimbra, to hear a Renaissance setting of yet another latin poem. This is “Te Lucis ante Terminum”, an evening hymn translated by J.M.Neale as “Before the ending of the day / Creator of the world we pray”. The setting is by Aires Fernandez, almost all of whose compositions are preserved in manuscripts from Santa Cruz in Coimbra. It’s sung by A Capella Portuguesa, under Owen Rees.

MUSIC: Aires Fernandez : “Te lucis ante terminum” 94R11 # 16 2:36

KANE: “Te lucis ante terminum” by Portuguese Renaissance composer, Aires Fernandez, concluding this *series* of Early Music: poems, pilgrims and Parodies, presented by me Ciaran Kane. Good-bye for now.

Music timings: 42: 48

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