

Early Music: Prayers at Nightfall

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 1
Sunday 1st May 2005

MUSIC: Deus in adjutorium 97R50 // 12 NB: first 0:40 only

KANE: Hello, and welcome to a *new* series of 'Early Music', this month centred on 'Prayers at nightfall'. I'm your host for the coming 50 minutes or so, Ciaran Kane. And the verse of music you just heard is the latin introduction to the "prayers of the hours", as they're called --- the formal times of prayer during the day, in the Christian tradition of monastery and church congregation. "O God, come to my aid: O Lord make haste to help me". The most important of the traditional structured prayer services is the one in the *evening*, known as Vespers (from the latin word for 'evening'), or Evensong, Vigil, Nightsong. Monteverdi, Mozart, Rachmaninov, have left us well-known "Vespers" settings: but there are many more, not least in the era of 'Early Music'. Individual *items* in the service have *also* found independent musical expressions, such as the gospel canticle "My soul glorifies the Lord", the "Magnificat". A *hymn* is normally *part* of Vespers or Evensong; so let's *start* this series and this programme today with a hymn, for Vespers of the festival of the Ascension: "Jesu, nostra redemptio" (Jesus our salvation). This is by 17th century French organist and composer, Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers, written for the famous royal convent school of St Cyr where Nivers became organist and singing teacher. He was also organist at the church of St Sulpice in Paris for 63 years, the *same* length of time as a more recent successor of his there, Charles-Marie Widor. In this recording, the choir sings only the 2nd and 4th verses, the organ played between, in different registers, the final section being a solemn fugue on the hymn theme.

MUSIC: Nivers ---- Jesu nostra redemptio 98R10 // 7 5:30

KANE: The Ascensionday Vespers hymn, 'Jesu nostra redemptio' by Guillaume-Gabriel Nivers. Like *each* of the other prayer-times of the day, the core of the Vespers service is the singing or recitation of a

number of the biblical *psalms*. The *number* of psalms, and *which* ones, have varied over the centuries, but the basic *structure* of the church's evening prayer today is *very* like what it was 1500 years ago. If you've ever wondered why so many Baroque and other composers writing music for church use have a latin piece called "Dixit Dominus", the reason is simply that those are the first two words of Ps 109 in latin, the opening psalm of solemn vespers on Sundays and major festival days: "The Lord's revelation to my Master: 'Sit on my right: your foes I will put beneath your feet'". Before and after the psalm proper, there would be an antiphon or verse-phrase relating the psalm to the particular Sunday or festival-day. I've chosen different settings of "Dixit Dominus" for each programme in this series, starting today with one by Italian composer Orazio Benevolo. He was born in Rome some 11 years after the death of Palestrina, and in his own lifetime and for quite some time after was considered one of the great Master's worthiest successors, though now he's virtually unknown. For the last 25 years of his life, Benevolo was director of the Cappella Giulia, the musical establishment of St Peter's Basilica. He himself did not publish any of his large-scale choral works; and this setting of Ps 109 comes from a collection made in the 18th century by another Roman maestro di cappella. Benevolo's "Dixit Dominus" is sung by Le Concert Spirituel directed by Hervé Niquet.

MUSIC: Benevolo ----- Dixit Dominus 97R45 // 1 4:21

KANE: "Dixit Dominus", Ps 109, by Orazio Benevolo. Besides psalms, canticle and hymn, the evening prayer service also includes short readings of scripture and responsories, as well as intercession prayers and formal prayer like the Lord's prayer. The singing of Vespers, and providing music for it, spread beyond the confines of Europe in the Baroque era, when the traders and adventurers of Venice, then of Spain and Portugal and later of Holland and Britain opened routes to Asia and the southern Americas, where Christian communities took root. Some of the music was brought from Europe, some of the missionaries were themselves accomplished musicians and composers, and soon there was fusion. A notebook of sacred music sent from Beijing to Paris in the late 1700s, contains 13

'canticles' billed as "a collection of the principal prayers set to Chinese music.... sung during the office on days of great solemnity." Included is this version of the Lord's prayer

MUSIC: Messe des Jesuites.... --- Pater 98R43 // 14 2:40

KANE: The Lord's Prayer, as used in Beijing in the mid-1700s on church solemnities. The gospel canticle "Magnificat" has been part of the church's evening prayer almost everywhere and from earliest times. So it *too* is an item I plan to present different versions of in this Early Music series, 'prayers at nightfall'. The *text* of 'Magnificat' (my soul glorifies the Lord) is from St Luke's gospel in chapter one, as spoken by Jesus' mother Mary in response to the greeting and blessing of her cousin Elizabeth. It's received numerous magisterial treatments by composers great and not so great, and in varied languages, both as *part of Vespers* and on its *own*. *Today's* choice is from maybe the best-known of all full Vespers settings, Claudio Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers of the Blessed Virgin. It's his major religious work, written before he got the prestigious job of maestro di cappella at St Mark's, Venice, and possibly written as an audition piece for that post. It was revolutionary in its day, making bold use of secular inventions that Monteverdi used to great effect in his influential operas and other vocal work. In this recording we hear the Taverner Consort, Choir and Players directed by Andrew Parrott.

MUSIC: Monteverdi --- Magnificat 97R22-1 // 2 17:17

KANE: The Magnificat from Claudio Monteverdi's 1610 Vespers of the Blessed Virgin. Back some 1500 years ago, St Benedict in his revised monastic rule, made the *time* of Vespers a little *earlier* in the evening, divided it in two, and so created a shorter later *night-prayer* now known as Compline (from the latin word for 'complete' or 'end'). At the Reformation, the Anglican church put them back *together* again as "Evensong", which thus now has a *second* gospel canticle, that of Simeon "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace"(Nunc Dimittis). This text *also* is from St Luke's gospel, in chapter two. In the manuscripts of the great monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra,

Portugal, there's *this* setting of "Nunc Dimittis" by 16th century Portuguese composer Aires Fernandez, who stays close to the *chant* tone of the canticle.

MUSIC: Fernandez --- Nunc Dimittis 94R11 // 20 2:17
[NB: short gap to //21]

KANE: It's actually *outside* the traditional *structure* of evening prayers, but for *centuries* the monastic day has ended with the singing of a hymn in honour of the Virgin Mary, for most of the year "Salve Regina" with seasonal alternatives from before Christmas until Pentecost. That's why there are so *many* settings, *particularly* of Salve Regina (Hail, Queen, Mother of mercy): and some composers produced a *number* of versions: Vivaldi 3, Scarlatti 5, for instance. Pergolesi wrote two, the second of them at the very *end* of his short life, and with a strong thematic likeness to his 'Stabat Mater'. For soprano, two violins and basso continuo, here it is with soprano Maria Zadori.

MUSIC: Pergolesi --- Salve Regina 91R10 // 19 – 23 8:43

KANE: Salve Regina, by Pergolesi. And to take us to the end of this programme of "Early Music: Prayers at nightfall", the antiphon that goes before and after the "Nunc Dimittis" canticle we heard earlier ---- 'Save us Lord while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with Him in peace'. "Salva nos", by another Portuguese composer at Coimbra, Pedro de Cristo who was an exact contemporary of the great Spaniard, Victoria. Till next week, good-bye

MUSIC: Pedro de Cristo --- Salva no 94R11 // 21 1:20

Music: 42:48

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