

Early Music: Prayers at Nightfall

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 3
Sunday 15th May 2005

MUSIC: Deus in adjutorium 97R50 // 12 NB: first 0:42 only

KANE: This is “Early Music”, and the third in a short series on Prayers at Nightfall. I’m your host, Ciaran Kane, presenting sacred music of the Baroque and before, connected loosely with the daily prayer-service of Evensong or Vespers. There’s something about eveningtime and nightfall that triggers quietening and reflection, nostalgia or romance : in English even the very *words* have a poetic feel, some mystery about them: dusk, nightfall, sundown, evening, twilight. Serenade, a song at eveningtime, besides romance also connotes restfulness, quiet, gentleness. It’s a natural instinct towards the end of day, to turn to God (by whatever name deity is known), in rest, contentment, gratefulness for the day that’s fading. Vespers, the communal evening prayer of Christians, is a kind of serenade to the Lord at the time when lamps need to be lit as the daylight dims and night starts to fall. There was an *earlier* name for this time of prayer: ‘Lucernarium’: the lighting of the lamps, for it took place *after* sunset and lamps served not only to give *light* but for *symbolism* too; like the burning of *incense*, recalling the biblical ‘evening sacrifice’, and the prayers of the saints ascending to heaven. But, to some music: a Vespers antiphon, to go with the Magnificat, by Italian 17th century composer Giovanni Battista Crivelli. He was active in several music centres in northern Italy and southern Germany, including service at the courts of Munich and Modena; and was considered a potential successor to Monteverdi at Venice: he died in 1652. Here’s his “O Maria Mater gratiae” (Mary, mother of grace, mother of mercy)

MUSIC: Crivelli --- O Maria Mater gratiae 98R08 // 16 3:26

KANE: “O Maria Mater gratiae”, a Vespers antiphon by Giovanni Battista

Crivelli. He was a contemporary of Giovanni Antonio Rigatti, the composer of the extended version of the Vespers psalm “Dixit Dominus” Ps 109 that we’ll listen to next. Rigatti was born in Venice, spent a few years as choirmaster at the cathedral of Udine before returning to his native city to serve as both singer and priest at St Mark’s, and eventually as maestro di cappella to the Patriarch of Venice. In Monteverdi’s last years, Rigatti was the outstanding church composer, and published nine volumes of sacred music. His 1640 publication of ‘Masses and Psalms’ coincided with the appearance of Monteverdi’s famous ‘Selva Morale’. Rigatti’s ‘Dixit Dominus’ most likely was written for use in St Mark’s Basilica.

MUSIC: Rigatti --- Dixit Dominus 98R08 // 3 12:56

KANE: Ps 109 “Dixit Dominus” (‘The Lord’s revelation to my master’: Ps 110 in Hebrew), by Giovanni Antonio Rigatti of Venice. It was performed by the Vancouver Cantata Singers with The Whole Noyse and members of the Pacific Baroque Orchestra. It’s maybe not *too* surprising if Venice and Italian composers have dominated this programme and series so far; for, in contrast to Rome and elsewhere where settings of the *Mass* were more common, Venice favoured Vespers. So let’s now move north to Germany, and a *German* version of the Vespers canticle, ‘Magnificat’, “Meine seele erhebet den Herren”. Heinrich Schütz in his 87 years of life was the same *era* as the aforementioned Italians; and of course he *too* spent a couple of years in Venice, with Giovanni Gabrieli, becoming proficient in composition and organ. Much of his working life he then spent in Dresden, with interludes in Copenhagen, Hildesheim, Brunswick and Weissenfels. In the late 1620s Schütz returned to Venice for a while and found it a very different place from 20 years before: this time *Monteverdi* was his mentor there and introduced him to the new fashions, especially in dramatic writing. His double-choir German Magnificat was published among his second volume of ‘symphoniae sacrae’ in 1647. It’s sung in this recording by the Hilliard Ensemble, with London Baroque and Knabenchor Hannover.

MUSIC: Schütz --- Meine Seele erhebet den Herren 97R22 // 3 7:46

KANE: The German Magnificat of Heinrich Schütz. For a Vespers *hymn* this week, I've chosen to stay in Germany but from a much earlier period. Hildegard of Bingen has become something of a modern icon, but quite often *divorced* from her historical, religious, sociological or spiritual background. The music and hymns she wrote were basically for her own monastic sisters of the Benedictine tradition, for use in their daily prayer services. In her day, and especially for the celebration of *saints'* days, there was a greater *latitude* and also an inventive *blossoming* of new texts for hymns and antiphons and sequences particularly in the prayers of the hours. Hildegard was a visionary and multi-talented lady, and had the creative musical and poetical talents and skills to make good use of these possibilities. Her most complete musical contribution was a *full* set of antiphons and hymns for the day's prayer services (Matins, Lauds and Vespers) for the September feastday of St Ursula. The legend of St Ursula and her accompanying 11,000 virgin martyrs was at the *height* of its popularity in the middle of the 12th century, especially in the regions of the Rhine valley, the fervour of her cult fuelled by the discovery in 1155 of an old Roman gravesite in Cologne. Hildegard's hymn for Vespers shows a deep knowledge of the bible and its interpretation tradition: its ten verses are studded with images from the Old Testament, allegory, and the fulfilment of prophecy, references to Abraham's encounter with God, the sacrifice of Isaac, Moses' vision of God. It describes a vision of a huge procession, of Ursula and her companions standing before the throne of God, and her apotheosis in the changing of her earthly name Ursula (meaning 'little bear') to the heavenly one Columba (meaning dove, and symbol of purity, wisdom and peace). "Cum vox sanguinis Ursulae" (When the voice of the blood of Ursula and her innocent band resounded before the throne of God) is sung by Anonymous 4.

MUSIC: Hildegard of Bingen ---- Cum vox sanguinis 97R46 // 14 8:09

KANE: "Cum vox sanguinis", a hymn for Vespers of the festival of St Ursula and her 11,000 companions, by Hildegard of Bingen. There's another, more 'official', hymn for a feast-day Vespers that's left an impact on western music that's *felt* and *known*-about up to this day,

though maybe not so many people actually know it. The Vespers hymn for the mid-summer's Feastday of St John the Baptist begins with the line "Ut queant laxis"; the second line is "resonare fibris", the third "mira gestorum", the fourth "famuli tuorum", the fifth "Solve polluti", the sixth "labii reatum", the seventh "Sancte Joannes" --- recognise anything ? ... seven lines, and the initial *syllables* 'ut' 're' 'mi' 'fa' 'so' 'la'and in the old plainchant each line starting a note higher. Here's a setting of the hymn itself, made in south America by Spanish-born Juan de Araujo who went to Lima as a child with his government-servant father, studied there, later became a priest and served for 32 years before his death in 1712 in the cathedral of La Plata (now Sucre in Bolivia). De Araujo was a prolific composer, though his sacred music output in latin was not large; and he never adapted from the european baroque style that fitted better in wealthy cities than in the rural Indian milieu

MUSIC: Juan de Araujo --- Ut queant laxis BB23934 // 2 2:27

START at 06:10 run to 08:35

KANE: The hymn in honour of St John the Baptist, 'Ut queant laxis', from which our "do-re-mi-fa-so" came. Finally, back to Italy and Venice again for the close-of-the-day hymn "Salve Regina". This setting is by Francesco Cavalli, a singer and composer better known as a writer of operas (he's credited with 33, including one he wrote in Paris on commission for the marriage of Louis XIV). Cavalli was also an organist at St Mark's, Venice, and eventually became maestro di cappella there, at the age of 66. His 'Salve Regina' is for four men's voices.

MUSIC: Cavalli --- Salve Regina 98R45 // 4 6:16

KANE: "Salve Regina" by 17th century Italian composer Francesco Cavalli. And that's all I have for you in today's edition of Early Music: prayers at nightfall. Next week, another, longer "Salve Regina" by a more *known* composer: another "Dixit Dominus" psalm, another 'Magnificat', and other antiphons or hymns for Vespers. From me, Ciaran Kane, good-bye till then

[Music timing 41:42 text wordcount 1311]