

Early Music: Prayers at Nightfall

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 5
Sunday 29th May 2005

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

KANE: Hello again, and welcome to this *last* programme in the short series of “Early Music: prayers at nightfall”, sacred music *from* or connected with the traditional eveningtime prayer of the Christian church, Evensong or Vespers. I’ve mentioned before some *regular* features of the evening prayer-service, and chosen samples of *some* of these each week, the “Magnificat” canticle, the psalm “Dixit Dominus”, and the Marian hymn which actually comes after Compline rather than Vespers. But I *haven’t* said much about the formal *hymn* which is normally at the *start* of the service, even though a hymn of *some* sort has appeared in this programme each week. So the first music today is one of the traditional old formal Vespers hymns, “O Lux beata Trinitas”, in a setting by William Byrd: (O Trinity of Blessed Light). There *used* to be a different hymn for each evening of the week, and all of them are ancient, dating mostly from about the sixth century. They also had the significant characteristic of each being devoted to the praise of one of the biblical days of creation: thus on Sunday it was the creation of light, Monday the separation of earth and waters, Tuesday the creation of the plants, Wednesday the creation of the sun and moon, Thursday the creation of fish, Friday the creation of the beasts of the earth. The one for *Saturday* evening, however, was different; Saturday evening being the vigil or start of the Lord’s Day, Sunday, and the hymn thus honouring the Trinity. “O Lux beata Trinitas” is sung by the Clare College Chapel Choir of Cambridge.

MUSIC: Byrd ---- O lux beata Trinitas 98R03 // 23 5:13

KANE: “O lux beata Trinitas”, by William Byrd, the formal hymn for Saturday evening Vespers in the old Roman rite. For solemn vespers, there was

a sequence of psalms, *beginning* with no.109 (or 110 in the Hebrew numbering), the “Dixit Dominus” one I’ve played each week in this series. Ps 111 (or 112) is “Beatus Vir”, another one that quite a lot of composers have put to music (‘Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments’) The version of it I’ve chosen is by an Austrian composer and virtuoso violinist at the court of Leopold I, who was responsible for producing the dance music for court banquets and opera performances, and was hailed as a kind of Baroque Johann Strauss in his own day. He was Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, who eventually became Kapellmeister at the Habsburg court, the first *Austrian* to hold that post after many many years of Italians. Schmelzer’s solemn vespers varies in setting and style from movement to movement: “Beatus Vir” is set for double choir, with viols, violins, tiorba and two organs. It’s sung in this recording by Gradus ad Parnassum, under Konrad Junghänel

MUSIC: Schmelzer ---- **Beatus Vir** **96R10 // 17** **3:01**

KANE: Ps 111 “Beatus Vir” (‘Blessed is the man who fears the Lord’), from the solemn vespers of Johann Heinrich Schmelzer. Domenico Scarlatti’s keyboard sonatas (he left over 500 of them) are his great claim to fame, and have been for many budding pianists their first encounter with one of the ‘greats’ of classical music. In his earlier years, Domenico also wrote a number of operas, oratorios and cantatas, most of which are now lost. His life up to the age of about 32 was dominated by his well-known father Alessandro (and it took a legal document for him to achieve his independence). While still under the domination of his father, Domenico became for a short while the assistant and then the substantive maestro di cappella at the Cappella Giulia of St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Most of his remaining sacred compositions were written at this time. Among them is a setting of *Salve Regina*, the end-of-day hymn to Mary that follows the prayer-service of Vespers and Compline. It’s in the form of a solo cantata of four sections, in which there are *some* elements of opera and drama, as well as lyrical and emotive expression. Domenico Scarlatti’s “Salve

Regina” (‘Hail O Queen, mother of mercy’) is sung in this recording by countertenor James Bowman, with The King’s Consort.

MUSIC: Scarlatti ---- Salve Regina 96R27 // 1 – 4 13:01

KANE: “Salve Regina” by Domenico Scarlatti, written in the 1710s. Later, he left Italy for good and spent his last 30 years in Madrid, absorbing *Spanish* elements into his famous keyboard sonatas. In contrast, a Spanish-born composer, some years his senior and who spent most of his *life* in south America, mainly in Lima, Peru, and modern-day Bolivia, did not incorporate *anything* of the local musical flavour or instrumentation. He was Juan de Araujo (1646 to 1712), a prolific composer of Spanish song, who was attached to the cathedral of La Plata for the last 30 or so years of his life. His output of sacred music in latin was relatively small. But I’m turning to him for *this* week’s version of the regular solemn Vespers psalm “Dixit Dominus”. Earlier in the month we had a *hymn* of his: in fact he’s the *only* composer (apart from Monteverdi) getting a *second* outing in this Early Music series of music for prayer at nightfall : “Dixit Dominus” by Juan de Araujo

MUSIC: Juan de Araujo ---- Dixit Dominus 97R49 // 3 4:17

KANE: The Vespers psalm, “Dixit Dominus” (‘The Lord’s revelation to my master’), by Juan de Araujo, written and first sung in south America around the turn of the 18th century. For the final “Magnificat” setting in this series, back to Venice and music created for all-girl voices. There were *other* composers besides Vivaldi, and other *orphanages* besides his Pieta in the Venice of the time. One of the most *colourful* composers associated with music at the Venetian ospedale was Nicola Porpora, from Naples, a singing-teacher and composer of operas. While still based in Naples, he wrote operas for the court at Vienna and had other engagements in Germany. His first opera for *Rome* was written in collaboration with Domenico Scarlatti, from whom we heard earlier. In 1726, aged 40, Porpora settled in Venice and for seven years was maestro at the ospedale degli incurabili. Then he spent some time in London where he was invited to write an opera, in competition with

Handel: he stayed and wrote four more. Then, back to Venice for a while, and to Naples, and then in the early 1740s to Venice again as maestro at the Pieta. In 1747 he moved to Dresden, later to Vienna where he gave singing lessons and also taught composition to a young man called Joseph Haydn who, in return, acted as his valet and keyboard accompanist. Porpora finally returned to his native Naples. Among his pupils there had been some of the great voices of the age, including the famous castrati Farinelli and Caffarelli. He's said to've kept Caffarelli working exclusively on a single page of vocal exercises for six years, and at the end of that time told him: "Go forth, my son, you're the greatest singer in the world". Nicola Porpora's "Magnificat", written for one of the girls' choirs of Venice is sung here by the San Francisco Girls Chorus.

MUSIC: Porpora ---- Magnificat SFGC 9801 // 15 – 20 10:31

KANE: The 'Magnificat' by Nicola Porpora written for one of the Venetian orphanage choirs, around the 1730s. Finally today, and to *conclude* this *series* of "Early Music prayers at nightfall", a setting of the *other* evening gospel canticle, "Nunc Dimittis", the Song of Simeon, which is *included* in the Anglican Evensong, but occurs in the latin Compline rather than Vespers. Over a hundred years older than that *last* music, this setting is by Orlando Gibbons, one of the most highly-regarded English musicians of his generation. It's from his Second Service, sung in English..... *and* an appropriate text for me to bow out on: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word". It's sung by Oxford Camerata with Jeremy Summerly

MUSIC: Gibbons ---- Nunc Dimittis 96R29 // 11 3:50

KANE: "Nunc Dimittis" by Orlando Gibbons. You've been listening to the *last* in a short *series* of programmes "Early Music: prayers at nightfall", with me Ciaran Kane. Until we meet again on radio 4, good-bye

music : 40:35 text: 1313

Fill (pre-fade): Schmelzer: Sonata per chiesa 96R10 // 1