

Early Music: Prayers at Nightfall

RTHK Radio 4
10 – 11 am

Programme 4
Sunday 22nd May 2005

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

KANE: Welcome to “Early Music: prayers at nightfall”, with me Ciaran Kane. This week let’s start straight into the *one* item that’s *always* part of Evensong and Vespers, the gospel canticle “My soul glorifies the Lord”, ‘Magnificat anima mea Dominum’. And this week’s *version* of it is one of 38 published in six volumes between the years 1603 and 1641 by one Johann Stadlmayr, a native of Bavaria, Germany, a prolific composer of liturgical church music and well-known around Europe in his own day. In his late mid-twenties Stadlmayr was employed by the Archbishop of Salzburg and soon appointed cathedral Kapellmeister. Some years later in 1607 he went off to Innsbruck to the court of the Hapsburg Archduke Maximilian who was a great admirer of his music. This Stadlmayr ‘Magnificat’ is one of his earlier compositions and was dedicated to the Salzburg Archbishop. It’s for 8 voices, and does not follow the then-common alternating style of verse presentation. It’s sung by the Salzburg Bach Choir, directed by Howard Arman.

MUSIC: Stadlmayr --- Magnificat 97R09 // 9 6:09

KANE: “Magnificat” for 8 voices, just one of 38 versions of that gospel canticle composed by Johann Stadlmayr, in the first half of the 17th century. As I said before, the psalm “Dixit Dominus”, ps 109 in the latin (110 in Hebrew) has been another *fixture* of the solemn Vespers of Sundays and festival days, and thus put to music quite often by *many* composers, especially in the Baroque era. I had intended giving you *Handel’s* version of it, one of his not many *latin* settings, until I checked and found it’s *far* too long to play in *full* (over 33 minutes in the recording I have). More manageable is his setting of *another* psalm for Vespers, Ps 126 “Nisi Dominus” (127 in Hebrew) “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who

build it labour in vain". These, and a few other latin pieces, were written by the young Handel in Rome in the summer of 1707, and may well have been part of the solemn vespers for the festival of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on 16th July that year in the Carmelite church of Sta Maria di Monte Santo. "Nisi Dominus" begins and ends with strong double-choir choruses: and Handel uses a musical *pun* at the end, where at the words "sicut erat in principio" ('as it was in the beginning') the *music* repeats the *beginning* of the whole piece. The Sixteen Choir and Orchestra are conducted by Harry Christophers.

MUSIC: Handel ---- Nisi Dominus CD 12384 // 1 – 6 12:20

KANE: "Nisi Dominus", Ps 126, by George Frederick Handel. It's early Handel, and qualifies as "Early music", falling within the time-frame up to the end of the Baroque period in Europe. That *time*-scale fits my next choice; but it's *not* European music, though the *text* comes from Latin and is a mixture of latin and chinese. This is "Sanctissima" (Most Holy), a canticle or sacred song in honour of Mary, one of 3 such in a collection of 13 hymns, songs and prayers in a manuscript sent from Beijing to Paris in the late 1700s, billed as "a collection of the principal prayers set to Chinese music () sung () during the office on days of great solemnity" in the Jesuit 'north church' there. Most of these latin texts were translated before the fall of the Ming dynasty, and put to music adapted from Chinese melodies by Christian converts. The music is in the style of the "Airs of the South and North", related to the classical Kunqu opera style. We'll *first* hear a short entertainment piece for the Manchu court (from the same manuscript source), and then "Sanctissima".

MUSIC: Amiot ---- Sanctissima 98R43 // 12 5:09

KANE: A canticle, 'Sanctissima', from a collection of hymns and prayers used for the morning or evening prayer-service on major feast-days in Beijing's North Church in the 1700s and possibly earlier. The *connection* there

was the French Jesuit fathers: and it was for the Jesuit church in Paris a little earlier that Marc-Antoine Charpentier worked for a while, composing dramas and mini-oratorios and motets of various kinds. What was “in” at the royal court at the time was the “grand motet”, some of which were almost mini operas in length and complexity; and also the contrasting “small motet”. Three choirs and an orchestra and over eight-minutes of music probably qualify Charpentier’s “Salve Regina” as a ‘grand-motet’. It begins, certainly, with the melody from the ‘solemn’ plainchant version, as distinct from the ‘ordinary’ one. “Salve Regina” (Hail, Queen) is the hymn after the end of night-prayers during most of the year, in the daily prayer-services of the Christian church.

MUSIC: Charpentier ---- Salve Regina 94R12 // 3 8:28

KANE: “Salve Regina” by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Beginning this series of “Early Music: prayers at nightfall”, I’ve mentioned the prominent position of the psalm “Dixit Dominus” (Ps 109 or 110), *and* that there’d be a version of it in each programme of the series. In homage to Monteverdi and his famous outstanding Vespers of 1610, I also indicated that I’d have *more* than *one* excerpt from *him*. Well, here they come together now, the psalm in Monteverdi’s version. “The Lord said unto my Lord: sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Sion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thine is the kingdom in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness: I have borne thee from the womb before the morning star”. The psalm “Dixit Dominus” from Claudio Monteverdi’s Vespers of 1610, performed by the Scholars Baroque Ensemble.

MUSIC: Monteverdi ----- Vespers: Ps 109 CD 54598 – 1 // 2 7:23

KANE: The psalm, ‘Dixit Dominus’, from Claudio Monteverdi’s 1610 Vespers. To *end*, today, a return to Beijing and something a bit unusual. Among the books In the old library of the French Jesuits in Beijing (now dispersed between the National Library and the Municipal Library in Shanghai)

there were volumes of music brought to China from Europe from the 16th century onwards. Among these was a volume of religious madrigals and easy songs by various composers of the age, published in Rome in 1599. Included in this was a madrigal for three voices, celebrating the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by Simon Boyleau. He's not important enough to merit entry in the few sources I've been able to check in print or internet: but it seems he was born around 1544 in Savoy and lived in northern Italy, mostly around Milan and Turin. Like other madrigals in the same collection, there's not much difference between the secular and the religious ones: it's only in the third section of Boyleau's madrigal that there's any direct reference to Mary. This begins "For on this joyous day was bounteous Beauty born, and safe were the Virtues once more". From Simon Boyleau's madrigal for the birth of the Blessed Virgin

MUSIC: Boyleau --- Per la Nativita della Beata Vergine 98R43 // 13 2:27

KANE: A madrigal for the birthday of the Blessed Virgin, by Simon Boyleau, music which was in the library of the North Church in Beijing during the 17th and 18th centuries, so quite likely was sung there on some occasion. And that's the end of *this* week's programme of "Early Music: prayers at nightfall". Next week will be the *last* in this short series, and feature a Scarlatti "Salve Regina" and a "Magnificat" by the colourful Italian composer and singer, contemporary of Handel, Nicola Porpora. Till then, good-bye.

Music timings: 42:38

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