

CAMBRIDGE TAVERNER CHOIR

Owen Rees - director

EUROPE 1500



MUSIC FROM THE PAPAL COURTS

Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge

3RD DECEMBER 2000

8.15 p.m.

Programme: Music by Josquin Desprez

Inviolata integra et casta es Maria

Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales:

Kyrie

Credo

Salve regina

Ave Maria Virgo serena

INTERVAL

Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales:

Sanctus/Hosanna

Benedictus/Hosanna

Planxit autem David

Benedicta es cœlorum Regina

The Cambridge Taverner Choir

director Owen Rees

sopranos

Helen Arnold
Diana Baumann
Josie Dixon
Helen Garrison
Rachel Godsill
Hester Higton
Sally Terris

altos

Janet Bullard
Toby Gee
Simon Godsill
Francis Knights

tenors

Paul Baumann
James Eisner
Tom Salmon
Joss Sanders
David Thomson

basses

James Durran
Frank Salmon
Gary Snapper
Paul Watson

The Cambridge Taverner Choir is a member of the National Federation of Music Societies



Our thanks to the Master & Fellows of Jesus College for their kind permission to use the chapel.

We conclude the current season of concerts exploring music in Europe c. 1500 with a glimpse of music at the Papal court, and specifically works by the most famous of the numerous northern musicians who was employed there in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: Josquin Desprez. His name first appears on a list of singers in the Papal Chapel (that is, the Cappella Sistina) in 1486 and he remained a member of the Chapel until the 1490s. The *Missa L'homme armé super voces musicales* is one of the pieces which Josquin probably composed during his period in Rome, and this work and a number of his motets—including *Planxit autem David*—remained in the repertory of the Cappella Sistina well into the sixteenth century. In tonight's concert we include the 'Et in Spiritum' section of the Credo of Josquin's Mass, which survives only in a mid-sixteenth-century Cappella Sistina source.

Rome was a flourishing cultural centre in 1500: the city attracted powerful figures from across Italy and beyond, including the resident cardinals of the papal court, each with his own household. There were also great numbers of pilgrims, especially in a Jubilee or 'holy year' such as 1500, when special indulgence was granted to pilgrims to Rome. Choirs were enlarged and music copied (and probably composed) for such Jubilees: the choir of St Peter's was re-staffed for the 1500 Jubilee. The resident cardinals provided considerable patronage for musicians. In his *De cardinalatu* of 1510, Paolo Cortesi recommended that a cardinal should maintain a household of some 150 people, including musicians, and a palace including a concert room. Papal patronage, in particular, brought foreign musicians from various parts of Europe, especially (with regard to the Papal choir) the northerners and the Spanish. It was Pope Sixtus IV who, in the 1480s, established the reformed Papal Chapel choir (of up to 25 singers) in the newly completed Cappella Sistina to sing the daily services of the papal court. The choir, which maintained a continuous tradition up to 1870, included such composers as Dufay, Josquin, Morales, and Palestrina among its members. It was a prestigious institution, its singers well paid and partly self-governing.

There survive two Masses by Josquin on the famous tune 'L'homme armé' ('The armed man'). In the Mass 'super voces musicales' the melody is laid out in the tenor part, set one note higher in each movement, and sung in reverse in the remarkable central 'Et incarnatus' section of the Credo, where Josquin builds from a strikingly still opening to a climax in 'Crucifixus'. In addition to music of great rhythmic complexity and drive, the Mass includes sections of extraordinary simplicity, such as the series of duets for ever higher voice-combinations which makes up the Benedictus.

Tonight's concert also includes four of Josquin's greatest motets dedicated to Mary. The six-voice *Benedicta es cælorum Regina* draws upon the plainchant of the Sequence from which it takes its text; the opening of the chant can be heard unadorned in the topmost voice and the tenor (which are in canon at first). The second section of the piece is a duo for upper voices, and a triple-time section then leads to a grand closing 'amen'. Josquin's setting of another Marian sequence—*Inviolata integra et casta es Maria*—bears some similarities to *Benedicta*: phrases of the chant can be heard against short-note decorations in other voices, and again the composer uses canon. Clear and direct text-setting is heard most clearly in the strikingly bare opening of *Ave Maria Virgo serena*, where each voice-part in turn presents the simplest of melodic shapes. Elsewhere in the piece Josquin brings all the voices together in chordal textures for climactic effect: at 'Maria plena gratia', and at the motet's very end with the petition 'O mater Dei, memento mei': 'O mother of God, remember me'. A much more elaborate but no less impassioned style is used in the five-voice setting of *Salve regina*: the altos present repeatedly the famous four-note motive which opens the *Salve* chant, around which the other voices weave contrapuntal textures, except at 'Et Jesum', where once again simple chords are employed for emphasis. Chordal writing lies at the heart also of the moving setting of the lament of King David for Saul and Jonathan, *Planxit autem David*.

The **Cambridge Taverner Choir**, founded in 1986, belongs to a generation of exciting early music chamber choirs which, like The Tallis Scholars and The Sixteen, emerged from the Oxford and Cambridge choral tradition. As well as regular concert series and festival appearances in Cambridge, the choir has performed in many parts of the U.K., and undertaken highly successful tours of Portugal in 1991 and Switzerland and Italy in 1996; it has also broadcast on Radio 3, and has been featured on Radio 4. The choir has released three recordings; all have been acclaimed by the critics, and *Music from Renaissance Portugal* was short-listed for the *Gramophone* Early Music Award in 1994.

The choir specialises in the performance of sacred polyphony in illuminating thematic, liturgical and physical contexts, aiming to recreate the grandeur and excitement of the European Renaissance, and especially the Tudor age in England and the Iberian 'Golden Age'. The choir also performs baroque and contemporary works. The 1995/6 season celebrated the music of John Taverner on the 450th anniversary of his death, and included a prestigious commission from the contemporary composer, John Tavener, while the 1996/7 season explored the music of five great European cities at the turn of the seventeenth century. In 1999 the choir performed the complete motets of J.S. Bach with guest director John Butt.

Owen Rees began his academic and conducting career as Organ Scholar at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, studying with Peter le Huray and Iain Fenlon. After a period as College Lecturer in Music at St Peter's College and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he joined the Music Department at the University of Surrey. In 1997 he returned to Oxford, where he is Fellow in Music and Organist at the Queen's College, Lecturer at Somerville College, and Lecturer in the Faculty of Music. His published studies include work on musical sources and repertoires from Coimbra, and on the music of, for example, Francisco Guerrero and William Byrd. His work as a scholar has consistently informed his work as a performer. He has conducted at festivals in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Choirs under his direction have released CD recordings on the Herald, Hyperion, and Unicorn Kanchana labels, to consistently high critical acclaim.

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