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Music from the Sistine Chapel

The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS

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"The whole plan of singing in musical modes shall be constituted not to give empty pleasure to the ear, but in such a way that the words may be clearly understood by all, and the hearts of the listeners be drawn to the desire of heavenly harmonies, in the contemplation of the joys of the blessed"

Thus decreed the Council of Trent in 1562, and what better dictum for us to attempt to emulate? This recording will give you a rare insight into the world of the Papal chapels and in particular the most famous of all, that of the Sistine Chapel. The music can all be found in the Vatican library, where there is a wealth of scores often chaotically catalogued and inaccessible to scholars. Some of the manuscripts are so fragile that they can neither be safely handled nor photographed.

Allegri is one of those composers whose reputation and renown rests on a single work - the Miserere*. However, he wrote other motets and masses and here we will give you the opportunity to see Allegri in another light. Felice Anerio was another true master of composition. His music has, quite frankly, been a revelation to me and I hope it will be the same for you.

If, like Allegri and Anerio, you were associated with the Papal chapels in the sixteenth century or early seventeenth century, you could not fail to come under the magisterial influence of Palestrina. Without doubt he was the great master of all Papal composers and his spiritual craft and harmonic vitality fulfilled the needs of the Vatican. Just listen to his glorious motet for the Assumption, Assumpta est Maria, at the end of this disc, and you will understand completely.

Masters of the Papal Chapels

The Church of Rome has had a long and turbulent history, most famously with the great schisms of the late Middle Ages: the final separation of the Eastern and Western Christians after many centuries of dispute, by the rejection of the Council of Florence in 1472; and that precipitated by Urban VI, elected in 1378, resulting in the dual Papacies of Avignon and Rome, resolved in 1417 in favour of the latter city.

However by the end of the 15th century the Church had achieved a degree of stability, wealth and prestige which enabled it, in addition to its pastoral role, to be at the forefront of patronage of the Arts (painting, music and architecture), as well as a political power of considerable influence. Polyphonic music was well established, alongside the ancient chants, as an essential part of the ritual observances of the Church; singers and composers were in ever greater demand throughout the hegemony of the Roman religion, and the churches and choir schools of what are now the Low Countries and France were a great source of these for the great Italian city states as well as the Vatican.

*available on the coro label as cor16014
Built by Pope Sixtus IV (1471 - 1484), the Sistine Chapel is famous primarily for its magnificent decorations, notably the ceiling frescoes of Michelangelo. But just as magnificent, but more transient, was the music written in the next century and a half and sung by the Papal Choir within its walls. Notated in often richly-decorated manuscripts and sometimes issued in prints, preserved in the choir library until our time, this repertoire changed significantly in style throughout the 16th century. Initially dominated by Franco-Flemish composers, its flavour later swung in favour of native Italians, particularly when the Counter Reformation gained strength after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which had been set up mainly for the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Church in response to the heresies of the Protestants.

Such a pattern was also evident in the national make-up of the singers in the Choir, although there was a more even balance in the early years. Since the late 15th century the personnel had included three national groupings: the Franco-Flemish; the Italians; and the Spanish. With the accession of Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) in 1492, the “Spanish nation” in the Choir became significant, so much so that by 1512 there were nine in a choir of about twenty. In contrast, a hundred odd years later, the personnel was almost exclusively Italian: the Liber Missarum of Archangelo Crivelli (1546-1617), copied as Sistine Chapel codex 25, in the year of his death, lists the 31 singers who (presumably) were the performers of his six-voice Missa Canite tuba. Among them are three Spaniards, including Francisco Soto, (c.1533 - 1619), a castrato; one is other is French, D. Theophilus Garganus Gallicanus; the rest seem all to be Italians, mostly Romans. Interestingly, the Italians generally have the town of their origin appended to their name, such as D. Horatius Crescentius Neapolitanus (Naples), R. Archangelus Crivellus Garganensis (Bergamo), or R. Jacobus Razzius Perusinus (Perugia). Of course we must remember that the most famous Italian composer of the Renaissance called himself Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, after his birthplace.

The first Italian composer of stature whose works appear in the Papal archives was Costanzo Festa. Like his contemporary, Cristóbal Morales, he was a singer in the Sistine Chapel choir. Festa became a member in 1517 and died in 1545. His compositions were written in the by-then international, post-Josquin style, perhaps best exemplified in the works of Morales, who was a widely admired composer throughout Europe as well as in Spain and the New World. A later Italian was Giovanni Animuccia, a Florentine born in 1520, who worked mostly in Rome, and whose career straddled the period of the Council of Trent. He was Palestrina's most important Roman contemporary from 1550 on. Indeed in January 1555 he succeeded Palestrina (who had been admitted to the Sistine Choir that month) at St. Peter's as master of the Cappella Giulia, a post he held until his death in 1571, when he was in turn succeeded by Palestrina, who then held the post until his death in 1594. Palestrina, in the interim, had been ejected from the Sistine Choir in July 1555, in that year of the three Popes, because he was married. Stylistically, Animuccia's music is very much continuing in the traditions of Morales, Gombert, Festa and their contemporaries: the 1552 book of Motets is a Papal singer from 1577); and he sang under Palestrina in the Cappella Giulia that month) at St. Peter's from 1575 to 1579. He wrote the usual range of music for a composer of the time: madrigals both secular and sacred, music for the Liturgy, some of it issued in print.

Likewise Palestrina and his younger associates proceeded to rewrite much of the repertoire, with the revised texts of the Council of Trent, in a more transparent and text-orientated fashion. Ideally suited to the new needs of the revised Liturgy were pieces in double choir format, their declamatory style favouring intelligible projection of the text. Foremost in the composition of such music were the Spaniard Tomás Luís de Victoria, and Palestrina himself, as well as a host of younger composers, dominantly Italians, Romans such as the Nanino and Anerio brothers.

The elder Anerio brother, Felice, was born in 1560, began his career in 1568 as a choirboy at St. Maria Maggiore under Giovanni Maria Nanino (1545-1607, who was a Papal singer from 1577); and he sang under Palestrina in the Cappella Giulia from 1575 to 1579. He wrote the usual range of music for a composer of the time: madrigals both secular and sacred, music for the Liturgy, some of it issued in print.

But the great achievement of his life was his appointment as official Papal composer, on 3rd April 1594, on the death of Palestrina, who had held the post since 1565 - this triumph Anerio celebrated.
in the title of his 1596 book of Motets, declaring proudly in large bold print: “Felicii Anerii Capellae Apostolicae Compositoris,” and underneath in smaller lettering the actual contents: “Sacri hymni et cantica ...”.

In this publication, Anerio shows himself as a true master, at least the equal of any other of his Italian contemporaries, except the greatest of them all, Palestrina. The Marian Antiphons, Ave Regina caelorum, Regina caeli, and the Magnificat, all combine the many facets of his art - beautiful flowing polyphony mixed with more homophonic passages, rhythmic vitality, including shifts from duple to triple time and back, variation in density of scoring, all in accord with clear presentation of the text. Notable are the ostinato repetitions at gaudete and valde decora in Ave Regina; and the rising bass runs in Regina caeli at resurrexit. Anerio sets the complete Magnificat text, except the greatest of them all, Palestrina.

Attributed to Felice Anerio in the sole source, a Roman set of twelve partbooks, now incomplete, the Stabat Mater was published in 1874 by Haberl under Palestrina's name. The settings by Palestrina and Lassus for eight voices have long been appreciated, but this is perhaps the most ambitious and beautiful extant. It is striking in its unusual, and masterly, manipulation of harmonic rhythm to suggest triple time when the music is notated in duple, (for example, at the opening). True triple time is only used by the composer at the words Inflammatus et accensus... in die iudicia near the end. With its control of harmony, rhythm and texture, interest and forward emphasis by different voices combining to uplift the heart of the worshipper.

Gregorio Allegri is another composer well known today, but in his case his reputation has rested on just a single work, the Misere. Ironically, its fame is largely due to the decorations added to the simple chords, their secret jealously guarded by the Papal singers until the time of Mozart, who was reputedly the first outsider to write them down.

Born in 1582, Allegri was an important singer and composer in the Papal Choir after 1630. He died in 1652, but his Misere, and other polyphonic works, continued to be copied in the Sistine Chapel manuscripts almost into the 19th century. Like the Anerio and Nanino...
brothers (one of whom was his teacher of traditional counterpoint), his compositions encompassed both the modern style, in pieces for solo voices and basso continuo, as well as conventional 'old style' polyphony for four to eight voices, Masses, Motets, Hymns, Lamentations. Among the best of these is the Motet *Christus resurgens*, for double choir, copied in 1638 into the Sistine Chapel codices. Allegri was to use it as a model for his Mass of the same name, preserved in a Chapel manuscript copied as late as 1719.

Allegri shows himself to be a master too of more purely polyphonic writing, in his Masses for five and six voices. Among these, the Missa *Che fa oggi il mio sole*, for five voices, is modelled by Allegri on the brief, but striking, madrigal by that greatest of writers in the genre, Luca Marenzio (ca. 1553 - 1599). The Mass was copied, the sole item, into the Sistine Chapel codex 53, in 1664: this manuscript has as a frontispiece the motif *Assumpta est Maria*, has a text taken from the Song of Songs (the motet's Part II: *Quae est ista... acies ordinata?*). The melodic outlines of the motifs used by Palestrina are derived from or influenced by the plainchant (as with the rising phrase sung by the sopranos at the very beginning). The choice of voicing, with two tenors, give a solidity and richness to the middle of the texture, which balances well with the brilliance of the two sopranos. Palestrina repeats the substantial closing section of part I (beginning at the triple-time *Gaudeete...*) at the close of part II, so that the overall shape and balance is very satisfying.

Probably the earliest source for this piece is the Capella Sistina choirbook 76, dating from 1585 - 1599; but it is also in partbooks as late as 1751 (copied by "Joan[nis] Nicoletti Cappellae Pontificiae Cantoris"). Indeed there are numerous Sistine manuscripts from mid-century with music by not only Palestrina and his contemporaries, but even earlier masters such as Morales (d. 1553). That this music continued to be copied and used many years after their deaths shows the esteem in which the composers were still held. More significantly, there can have been little new repertoire of quality being composed to replace it.

Coincident with this was a decline in the standard and importance of the Choir itself. Falsettists singing the soprano line had always been an important part of the Choir, but they were gradually replaced by castrati. In the course of the 17th century, some of the castrati were even obliged, under protest, to sing the alto part (which was below their natural range), due to the increasing lack of high tenors. With the rise in popularity of opera, particularly Italian, there was suddenly a great demand for castrati - fame and, one imagines, mostly fortune, beckoned, and a place in the Papal Choir was now very far from the summit of a singer's or a composer's ambition. The loss of the best voices from the soprano and alto parts was inevitable and terminal. By the time of the visits of Mozart, then Mendelssohn (in 1831), the choir was by all accounts a mere shadow of that great Renaissance institution to which we owe so much today.

Acknowledgement
Thanks are due to Nigel Davison for his editing of the *Missa Che fa oggi il mio sole* by Allegri.

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The Angel of the Lord came down from heaven and spake to the women:
He whom you seek has arisen, as he said. Alleluia.

Angelus Domini descendit de caelo
et dixit mulieribus:
Quem quaeritis, surrexit, sicut dixit. Alleluia.

Regina caeli laetare
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia:
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia:
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia:
For he whom you were chosen to bear, alleluia:
He has risen, as he said, alleluia:
Pray for us to God, alleluia.

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Iuxta crucem lacrymosa,
Dum pendebat Filius.
Cuius animam gementem,
Contristatem et dolentem
Per transivit gladius.
O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!
Quae maeretur et dolore,
Et tremebat, cum videbat
Nati poenas inclyti.

The grieving mother stood by the Cross weeping where her son was hanging.
Her weeping soul, contrite and grieving, was pierced by a sword.
O how sad and distressed was that blessed Mother of the Only-begotten!
She who mourned and grieved, and shivered, while she watched the torment of her glorious child.
Iuxta Crucem tecum stare, 
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.

Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi iam non sis amara,
Fac me tecum plangere.

Fac, ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolere.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Cruce hac inebriare,
Ob amorem Filii.

Inflammatus et accensus
Per te, Virgo, sim defensus
In die iudicii.

Fac me cruce custodire,
Morte Christi praemuniri,
Confoveri gratia.

Quando corpus morietur,
Fac, ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.

Quis est homo, qui non fleret
Christi Matrem si videret.
In tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristari,
Piam Matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Iesum in tormentis,
Et flagellis subditum.

Vidit suum dulcem natum
Morientem, desolatum,
Dum emissi spiritum.

Eia Mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lageam.

Fac, ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum,
Ut sibi complacere.

Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifixe fige plagas
Cordi meo valide.

Tui nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Mecum poenas divide.

Fac me tecum vere flere,
Crucifixo condolere,
Donec ego vixero.

Who would not weep
to see the Mother of Christ
in such torment?

Who could not feel compassion
on beholding the Mother of Christ
suffering with her son?

For the sins of his people
she saw Jesus in torment
and subjected to the scourge.

She saw her own sweet offspring
dying, forsaken,
while he gave up the ghost.

O Mother, font of love,
make me feel the strength of your sorrow
that I may grieve with you.

Grant that my heart may burn
in the love of Christ the Lord
so that I might please him.

Holy Mother, do this for me:
Let the pain of the Crucified
be imprinted on my heart.

Of your wounded son,
worthy to be slain for me,
share with me the torment.

Make me truly weep with thee
and grieve with the Crucified,
as long as I live.

That I may stand with thee by the Cross,
sharing with thee in mourning,
this I desire.

Virgin of all virgins, most noble,
be not bitter with me,
let me lament with thee.

Make it that I may bear the death of Christ,
share his Passion
and endure his wounds.

Let me be wounded with his wounds,
let me be inebriated by the Cross
because of love for your son.

Inflamed and set afire,
through thee, Virgin, may I be defended
by you on the Day of Judgement.

Let me be guarded by the Cross,
armed by Christ's death,
strengthened by grace.

When my body dies,
grant that to my soul is given
the glory of Paradise.
Christus resurgens

Christus resurgens ex mortuis, iam non moritur: mors illi ultra non dominabitur, quod enim mortuus est, peccato mortuus est semel; quod autem vivit, vivit Deo. Alleluia. Mortuus est semel propter delicta nostra, et resurrexit, propter justificationem nostram. Alleluia. Quod enim mortuus est, peccato mortuus est semel; quod autem vivit, vivit Deo. Alleluia.

Christ, rising from the Dead, now dies no more. Death shall have no dominion over him; for that he died, he died to sin once; but that he lives, he lives to God. Alleluia! He died once for our sins and arose for our salvation. Alleluia! For that he died, he died to sin once; but that he lives, he lives to God. Alleluia!

Che fa oggi il mio sole

Che fa oggi il mio sole, Che fa il mio canto e il suono, Che non cantan di lei la gloria el nome? Or queste mie viole e questi fior gli dono, Che ne facci corona a le sue chiome.

What does today my sun, what does my song and music, if they sing not of her glory and name? Now I give her these my violets and these flowers that she may make a crown of them for her hair.

Missa 'Che fa oggi il mio sole'

Kyrie


Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.

Gloria


Gloria be to God on high. And on earth peace to men of good will. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee. We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty. O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us. For Thou only art holy, Thou only art the Lord, Thou only art the most high, Jesus Christ. With the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Credo

Credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Sanctus
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Benedictus
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

And I believe in one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.
And I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, give us peace.
Mary has been taken up to heaven:
the Angels rejoice,
they bless the Lord praising him.
Rejoice and exult all ye of upright heart,
for the Virgin Mary reigns with Christ
for ever.

Who is she who goes forth like
the growing dawn, beautiful as the moon,
brilliant as the sun,
terrible as battle camps in full array?
Rejoice and exult all ye of upright heart,
for the Virgin Mary reigns with Christ
for ever.

Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my
Saviour.
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his
handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done great things
to me, and holy is his name.
And his mercy is from generation unto
generation, unto them that fear him.
He hath put down the hungry with good things,
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He hath received Israel, his servant,
being mindful of his mercy.
As he spoke to our forefathers,
to Abraham and his seed for ever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and
to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever
shall be, world without end. Amen.

Assumpta est Maria

Mary has been taken up to heaven:
the Angels rejoice,
they bless the Lord praising him.
Rejoice and exult all ye of upright heart,
for the Virgin Mary reigns with Christ
for ever.
Who is she who goes forth like
the growing dawn, beautiful as the moon,
brilliant as the sun,
terrible as battle camps in full array?
Rejoice and exult all ye of upright heart,
for the Virgin Mary reigns with Christ
for ever.

The Sixteen

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