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JACOB OBRECHT

Missa Maria zart

Cappella Pratensis

Stratton Bull



SUPER AUDIO CD

JACOB OBRECHT

Missa Maria zart

Cappella Pratensis

Stratton Bull

Tim Braithwaite, Stratton Bull, Andrew Hallock superius

Lior Leibovici, André Pérez Muíño, Korneel Van Neste altus

Jonatan Alvarado, Peter de Laurentiis, Julian Podger tenor

Marc Busnel, Roland Faust, Grantley McDonald bassus

Stratton Bull artistic director

ANONYMOUS

[1] **Maria zart** **1:22**

PFABINSCHSWANTZ (GEORG PFAWENSCHWANTZ?) (fl. 1481-1499)

[2] **Maria sart** **2:05**

JACOB OBRECHT (1457/8-1505)

Missa Maria zart

[3] Kyrie **6:10**

[4] Gloria **14:50**

[5] Credo **13:21**

[6] Sanctus **13:59**

[7] Agnus Dei **8:52**

LUDWIG SENFL (ca.1490-1543)

[8] **Maria, du bist Genaden voll/Maria zart** **2:47**

ANONYMOUS

[9] **Maria zart** **1:21**

Total time 64:54

Sources:

[1 & 9] Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 18885

[2] Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. II.270 (text from Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 18885)

[3-7] *Concentus harmonici quattuor missarum, peritissimi musicorum Iacobi Obrecht* (Basel: Gregor Mewes, 1507) copied into a large choirbook by Marc Busnel

[8] Basel, University Library, F X 1-4 (text from Klosterneuburg, Augustiner-Chorherrenstift, Cod. 1228)

For more information on the sources used for this recording please check www.cappellapratensis.nl/en/sources/

Jacob Obrecht's *Missa Maria zart* is an extraordinary work, both literally, as probably the longest extant Mass of the Renaissance, taking an hour to perform, and in the more general meaning of the word. It has been mentioned in the same breath as the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007) and is recognised as one of the most ambitious artistic creations of its time; some have claimed that it defies description. This recording is the result of a dinner conversation between the writer of this note and the director of Cappella Pratensis, Stratton Bull. Stratton mentioned his interest in the complexities of Renaissance mensural notation and the difficulties that modern-day ensembles sometimes experience in interpreting it. I mentioned the *Missa Maria zart* as a case in point. Although several recordings of it already existed, few if any had succeeded in doing justice to its subtle system of mensuration signs and use of notation generally, and I expressed the hope that Cappella Pratensis might do so one day. Stratton's interest having been piqued, we agreed to convene a symposium on the topic (under the auspices of the Alamire Foundation, International Centre for the Study of Music in the Low Countries, based in Leuven) culminating in a public performance. The symposium was held in 2018 and the performance duly took place but plans for a recording were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This had the welcome if unintended consequence of permitting several other live performances before the recording sessions in September 2022: the interpretation that Cappella Pratensis commits to disc is well 'lived in'.

Jacob Obrecht was born in Ghent, the son of one of the city trumpeters. The marvellous portrait attributed to Quentin Metsys painted in 1496–7

makes clear that he was born between 1457 and 1459. His career included a string of posts as choirmaster in Northern France and the Low Countries (Cambrai, Bruges, Bergen op Zoom, Antwerp). Recent research reveals that Obrecht was not always reconciled to the disciplined, routine-laden existence of the singer-cleric, filled with daily church services, music copying and (in his case) not only composing but also the upkeep and teaching of choirboys. Not once but twice (in 1491 and again in 1500) he was dismissed from his post at the Church of St Donatian's in Bruges for politically imprudent conduct and unspecified troublemaking. This does not necessarily account for Obrecht's peripatetic tendencies, for singers often moved from one post to another; but in the circumstances, it may appear surprising that the dean and canons of St Donatian's should have re-appointed him at all. The probable reason was Obrecht's reputation as a composer, which had spread throughout Europe by the time he was thirty, no doubt reflecting positively on his employers. Already in 1487–8 they had assented to a personal request from the music-loving duke Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara to grant their chapel-master leave to visit him for a year, and there must have been other foreign visits for which documentary evidence is patchier (including one to France in the early 1490s). In 1504 Obrecht's search for more lucrative employment saw a return to Ferrara as the aging Ercole's maestro di cappella, apparently via Innsbruck where he had had dealings with the Imperial chapel the previous year. But the following January Ercole died, and Obrecht was dismissed from his post for unknown reasons. After a few short months spent in an unsuccessful search for a new position in Italy, he returned to Ferrara and himself died (of plague) in May or June 1505.

The bulk of Obrecht's surviving output consists of about 30 Mass cycles, nearly all of which are based on known cantus firmi, usually a piece of plainsong or the tenor of a polyphonic song. Obrecht was famous even after his death for his fluency and the balance of his compositions (the Renaissance pedagogue Heinrich Glarean reported that he could compose an entire Mass in a day).

It is not known when the *Missa Maria zart* was composed but there are good reasons for thinking it one of Obrecht's very last Mass cycles. The choice of a monophonic German devotional *lied* for its cantus firmus is unique in his oeuvre, and the only surviving source was published in Basel soon after his death (on which, more later). As mentioned earlier, Obrecht was at the court of Maximilian I at Innsbruck in 1503 and was paid for composing a Mass at the emperor's request. Although that Mass was probably not *Maria zart* (the *Missa Sub tuum presidium* being a more likely candidate) this stay is nevertheless the most plausible known context for its composition. It seems that as Obrecht grew more experienced as a Mass composer, he devised increasingly original responses to the challenges of the genre. *Sub tuum presidium* is equally remarkable, its texture growing from three voices in the Kyrie to seven in the Agnus dei, adding an extra voice in each movement. And yet it lasts only twenty minutes, as compact a cycle as *Maria zart* is vast. That their composer's life was cut short in his mid-40s makes one wonder what he might have achieved had he been spared as long as Josquin, Ockeghem, or Du Fay...

Even by Obrecht's standards *Maria zart* is unusually complex and inventive. The tune is broken up into segments, which unfolds in the tenor voice

(in the middle of the texture) over the duration of the entire Mass, a few segments at a time in each section but always in their correct order. By prescribing that the segments be read under different mensuration signs (Renaissance notation's equivalent of modern time-signatures), in some cases as many as five, Obrecht presents each segment first in long note values and then gradually shorter and shorter ones, giving the effect of acceleration over the course of each section. The last segment having been reached at the end of the *Osanna* (coinciding with the elevation of the host), the tune is stated in its entirety in the *Agnus dei*, first in the bass (*Agnus I*) and, most audibly of all, in the top voice (*Agnus III*), both times in long note values. The placement of the borrowed tune in the top voice is a shared feature of some of Obrecht's finest inspirations (the six-voice *Salve regina* and the Mass cycles on *Malheur me bat*, *Cela sans plus*, and the aforementioned *Sub tuum presidium*); the serene conclusion of *Maria zart* is another.

Obrecht appears to have been very fond of the segmentation procedure, which he used in several other Mass cycles (such as the very fine *Missa Malheur me bat*). But the *Maria zart* tune lends itself particularly well to the technique, for it consists only of breves and semibreves, with each pitch corresponding to a syllable of the devotional *lied*. This means that it is easier for the listener to follow than in other Masses, in which the model's rhythms are more complex. But in most of the sections where the tenor is silent (the *Christe*, two central duos in the *Gloria*, two central trios in *Credo*, the 'Pleni sunt celi' and the 'Benedictus' trios in the *Sanctus*, and the second *Agnus dei*, also a trio) the tune appears in different guises, some clearly audible and others cunningly concealed. In the two duos of the *Gloria* it is heard in its entirety for the first

time in the lower voice (albeit considerably ornamented); the higher voice sometimes joins in the quotation, but just as often it provides freely invented counterpoint. At the other extreme of recognisability, the 'Et incarnatus est' has a procedure that stands for Obrecht's love of the arcane: the first half of the tune appears in the bassus in semibreves, and its second half in the top voice in the same values; but these notes are scattered among other note values, making it all but impossible for the uninformed listener to pick them out.

The scale of the major sections and the density of its contrapuntal detail makes the experience of this Mass akin to a long-distance run or the scaling of some lofty mountain peak (neither, admittedly, an achievable goal for the writer). Obrecht's standard contrapuntal tricks — sequences, motion in parallel tenths between the voices, ostinato rhythms and melodic turns — are all present, but they do not audibly structure the musical form as in some of his other cycles. Instead, one can listen for the points of entry of the repeated tenor segments, and the structural upbeats that precede them in the other voices: the first *Kyrie* is a compact example of this, lengthier ones being the *Sanctus* and 'Osanna'. Another possible analogy is with breathing: the cantus firmus entries as exhalation points punctuating the musical form. The scale of the work makes them harder to appreciate initially, but with repeated listening the sonic architecture imprints itself in the listener's mind, until one anticipates and experiences these points of articulation almost as bodily responses. Perhaps the longest such span is in the final section of the *Credo*, beginning at the words 'Et unam sanctam': a descending fourth d' c' b-flat a (corresponding to the tune's ninth segment) begins in long notes in the tenor and is picked up in the bassus, then in the top voice; the tenor then restates it at a faster speed,

and the outer voices again follow suit; this happens a third time, faster still, after which the music breaks into an exultant triple time as the tenor continues, now moving as fast as the other voices. It is a breath-taking piece of musical architecture. The play with musical time, implicit in the mensural system, is foregrounded in *Maria zart* as in few other works of its day: if this was one of Obrecht's last musical statements, then truly he went out with a bang.

To complete the recording, Cappella Pratensis offers not only the Mass's model in its monophonic form but also two other polyphonic settings. The first is an anonymous one for four voices, with the tune in the tenor and a simple but euphonious chordal accompaniment; the second is by Ludwig Senfl, who served in Maximilian's court under the mentorship of Maximilian's official court composer, Heinrich Isaac. Senfl grew to be a master at combining different tunes in a single setting, and this one for five voices one expertly weaves together *Maria zart* and another devotional tune, *Maria du bist Genaden voll*. Might the young Ludwig have been present at, or even participated in, the first performance of Obrecht's marvellous musical time-machine?

An account of this recording would be incomplete without a description of the source from which Cappella Pratensis sings. The sole surviving source of the *Missa Maria zart* Mass is a set of partbooks from the presses of the Basel printer Gregorius Mewes, c. 1507, containing four Masses by Obrecht. Mewes is not known to have printed any other music, which is remarkable because his fonts are extremely elegant — even more than those of his Venetian

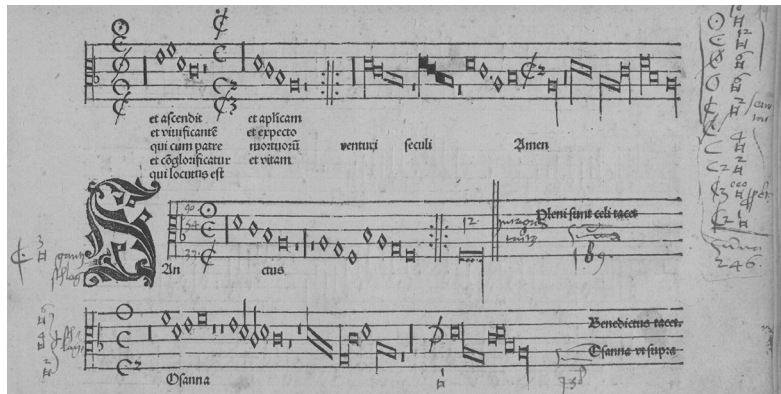
contemporary Petrucci, who produced dozens of prints over a period of decades. (Mewes' types allowed him to reproduce complex ligatures, which Petrucci's did not.) Like Petrucci he printed the staves first and the text and pitches later. But this process meant that in some cases the staves and the notes were misaligned, making it hard to be certain of the correct pitch. Given Cappella Pratensis' long-standing habit of performing from choirbook facsimiles, the Alamire Foundation commissioned Marc Busnel, one of the ensemble's basses and an extremely accomplished calligrapher, to make a



The hand of singer & calligrapher Marc Busnel, working on the manuscript copy of the Mass.

manuscript copy of the Mass in choirbook format for the ensemble's exclusive use. (In performance, the lectern around which the singers stand is turned several times in the course of the work, so that as much of the audience as possible can admire this marvellous object.) There is little doubt that it is in this format that Obrecht would have given his new work to its original recipient and the first singers would have sung it. Given the general agreement that *Maria zart* was probably commissioned for the Imperial court at Innsbruck, Cappella Pratensis uses the Germanic pronunciation that would have been in use there.

Fabrice Fitch



The tenor part of the end of the Credo and the Sanctus from the only surviving print (Basel: Gregor Mewes, 1507).

Since its founding in 1987 Cappella Pratensis has worked in close collaboration with musicologists. Its long-time association and present-day partnership with the Alamire Foundation—where it is ensemble in residence—has generated a number of collaborative projects, including this one on Jacob Obrecht's *Missa Maria zart*. This recording represents part of the output of this project.

The usual way Cappella Pratensis conceives the performance of a mass setting emphasizes research into its historical context, especially the evocation of the liturgy this music was created to adorn. In keeping with our continuing aspiration towards research-based performance, this recording takes a different approach. The focus here is shifted from the larger view of the work's meaning and significance within its historical and liturgical context to a closer examination of the work in terms of its internal coherence.

The larger project around Obrecht's mass included the 'experimental archaeology' endeavour of reconstructing a choirbook source of the mass, as well as the group's participation in and co-organisation of two symposia, in collaboration with the Alamire Foundation and the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. The first of these events (held as part of the Laus Polyphoniae festival in Antwerp) was specifically dedicated to the intricacies and implications for tempo of Obrecht's use of mensuration signs in this work. The second was about the mass more generally, including its historical significance and context, but also about what it means to perform from historical sources today. All aspects of the overarching project thus reflect our desire to bring this incredible work of art to life by putting new musicological insights into practice.

Stratton Bull & Peter de Laurentiis

Cappella Pratensis | Stratton Bull

The vocal ensemble Cappella Pratensis is a leader in the performance of polyphonic masterpieces from the 15th and 16th centuries, with a particular focus on the Low Countries. The group goes straight to the source, performing from facsimiles of original partbooks or choirbooks, the latter placed on a central music stand or projected on a large screen. Its programmes are intensively prepared and based on thorough musicological research, often in collaboration with leading scholars. Cappella Pratensis also enjoys a formal partnership with the Alamire Foundation, International Centre for the Study of Music in the Low Countries (University of Leuven). This multi-faceted approach results in a deep engagement with the music, in performances that get to the heart of this extraordinary repertoire. Cappella Pratensis also appears in surprising new contexts, regularly collaborating with theatre makers, dance companies, jazz artists and composers.

In addition to regular appearances at concert venues in the Netherlands and Belgium, Cappella Pratensis performs at leading international festivals and concert series throughout Europe, North America and Japan. The group has been ensemble-in-residence at Harvard University, the Fondation Royaumont (France), and Boston University, giving courses, presenting concerts and working with distinguished musicians. Its CD recordings have met with critical acclaim and distinctions from the press, including the Diapason d'Or, the Prix Choc and, for the last two CDs, two consecutive Gramophone Editor's Choice mentions. Gramophone magazine recognised the ensemble's recording of the Ockeghem Requiem as the best out of more than 20 recordings made over the last 40 years.

In 2022 Cappella Pratensis won the prestigious REMA-EEMN Heritage Project of the Year Award with the CD recording *Apostola apostolorum*.

Cappella Pratensis makes a priority of passing on its knowledge to both professionals and amateurs through masterclasses, workshops, multimedia presentations, and an annual summer course. In addition, it trains young singers within the ensemble itself.

www.cappellapratensis.nl



[1] Maria zart

Maria zart, von edler Art,
 ein Ros ohn allen Doren;
 du hast mit Macht herwieder bracht
 das vor lang war verloren
 durch Adams Fall. Dir hat die Wahl
 Sankt Gabriel versprochen.
 Hilf dass nit werd gerochen
 mein Sünd und Schuld. Erwirb mir Huld—
 Denn kein Trost ist wo du nit bist—
 Barmherzigkeit erwerben.
 Am letzten End bitt dich nit wend
 von mir in meinem Sterben.

[2] Maria sart

(see track 1 for full text and translation)

[3] Kyrie

Kyrie eleison.
 Christe eleison.
 Kyrie eleison.

[4] Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
 et in terra pax hominibus
 bone voluntatis.
 Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
 Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
 Gratias agimus tibi,
 propter magnam gloriam tuam.
 Domine Deus, rex celestis,
 Deus Pater omnipotens,

Sweet Mary, of refined nature,
 a rose without any thorn;
 you have mightily brought back
 what was long lost
 through Adam's Fall. To you St. Gabriel promised
 your election.
 Help that my sin and guilt be not avenged.
 Give me grace—
 For where you are not there is no consolation—
 to attain mercy.
 At my last hour, I pray,
 Do not turn away from me at my death.

Lord, have mercy on us.
 Christ, have mercy on us.
 Lord, have mercy on us.

Glory be to God on high,
 and on earth peace
 to men of good will.
 We praise you. We bless you,
 We worship you. We glorify you.
 We give thanks to you
 for your great glory.
 Lord, God, heavenly king,
 God the Father almighty,

Domine, Fili Unigenite Jesu Christe,
 Domine Deus, Agnus Dei,
 Filius Patris.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
 miserere nobis;
 qui tollis peccata mundi,
 suscipe deprecationem nostram.
 Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
 miserere nobis.
 Quoniam tu solus sanctus
 tu solus Dominus
 tu solus altissimus
 Jesu Christe.
 Cum Sancto Spiritu
 in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

[5] Credo

Credo in unum Deum,
 Patrem omnipotentem,
 factorem celi et terre,
 visibilium omnium, et invisibilium.
 Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum
 Filium Dei unigenitum
 et ex Patre natum ante omnia secula;
 Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
 Deum verum de Deo vero,
 genitum, non factum;
 consubstantialem Patri:
 per quem omnia facta sunt.
 Qui propter nos homines,
 et propter nostram salutem,

Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ,
 Lord God, Lamb of God,
 Son of the Father.

You who take away the sins of the world,
 have mercy on us;
 You who take away the sins of the world,
 receive our prayer.
 You who sit at the right hand of the Father
 have mercy on us.
 For you alone are holy,
 you alone are the Lord,
 you alone are the most high,
 Jesus Christ
 with the Holy Spirit
 in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

I believe in one God,
 the Father almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth,
 of all things visible and invisible.
 And in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 only begotten Son of God
 born of the Father before all ages;
 God of God, light of light,
 true God of true God
 begotten, not made;
 being of one substance with the Father:
 through whom all things were made.
 Who for us men
 and for our salvation

descendit de celis.
Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto
ex Maria virgine:
et homo factus est.

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis,
sub Pontio Pilato,
passus et sepultus est:
Et resurrexit tertia die
secundum scripturas,
et ascendit in celum,
sedet ad dexteram Patris,
et iterum venturus est cum gloria,
iudicare vivos et mortuos:
cuius regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum Dominum,
et vivificantem,
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre Filioque
simul adoratur et conglorificatur,
qui locutus est per prophetas.
Et in unam, sanctam, catholicam,
et apostolicam ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma
in remissionem peccatorum.
Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi seculi. Amen.

[6] Sanctus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt celi et terra gloria tua.

came down from heaven.
And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit
from the Virgin Mary:
and was made man.

He was crucified also for us
under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered and was buried:
And the third day he rose again
according to the scriptures,
and ascended to heaven,
and sits at the right hand of the Father,
and he shall come again in glory,
to judge both the quick and the dead:
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And in the Lord, the Holy Spirit,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
Who with the Father and the Son
together is worshipped and glorified,
who spoke through the prophets.
And 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 your glory.

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

[7] Agnus Dei

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

[8] Maria, du bist Genaden voll/ Maria zart

Cantus firmus: Maria zart
(see track 1 for full text and translation).

Maria, du bist Genaden voll,
Dein Gruß dein Lob soll mehren:
Der Herr mit dir. Du bist so wohl
Üb'r alle Weib zu ehren.
In keuscher Zucht, du edle Frucht,
Hast du uns, Frau, geboren
Und in hoher Demütigkeit
Versühnet des Vaters Zoren.
Erwirb uns, Frau, sein Gütigkeit,
Du reine Maid, daß wir nit werden verloren.

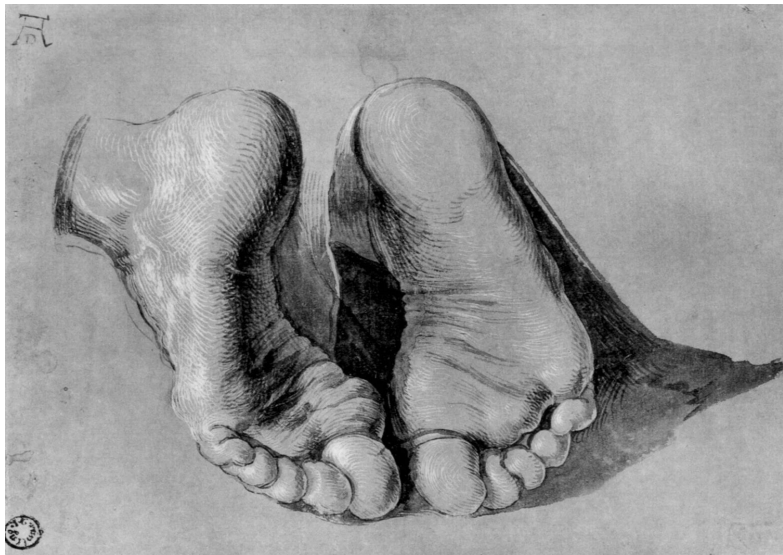
[9] Maria zart

Maria zart (see track 1 for full text and translation)

Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord:
Hosanna in the highest.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.

Mary, you are full of grace;
the greeting you received should magnify your praise:
"The Lord is with you!" You are indeed
worthy to be praised above all women.
In chaste discipline, you noble fruit,
you gave birth for us, o Lady,
and in your exalted humility
you appeased the Father's ire.
Win for us, o Lady, his grace,
you noble maid, that we not be lost.



Albrecht Dürer, Study of two feet c.1508, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

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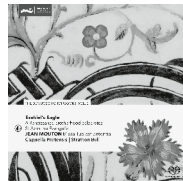


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THE DEN BOSCH CHOIRBOOKS, VOL. 1

Gaude Virgo!

A Renaissance brotherhood celebrates the Virgin Mary
PIERRE DE LA RUE Missa Cum jocunditate
Cappella Pratensis | Stratton Bull
Wim Diepenhorst Organ



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THE DEN BOSCH CHOIRBOOKS, VOL. 2

Ezekiel's Eagle

A Renaissance brotherhood celebrates St John the Evangelist
JEAN MOUTON Missa Tua est potentia
Cappella Pratensis | Stratton Bull



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THE DEN BOSCH CHOIRBOOKS, VOL. 3

Apostola apostolorum

A Renaissance brotherhood celebrates St Mary Magdalene
NICOLAS CHAMPION Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena
Cappella Pratensis | Stratton Bull

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic & Musikelectronic Geithain monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



NORTHSTAR
RECORDING
by **BERT VAN DER WOLF**



www.northstarconsult.nl

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A&R Challenge Classics by Marcel Landman, Valentine Laout & Mario Morese

Liner notes: Fabrice Fitch, Stratton Bull, Peter de Laurentiis

Translations: Grantley McDonald

Booklet editing: Stratton Bull, Peter de Laurentiis, Jan Willem Rodenburg

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Cappella Pratensis Business Manager: Jan Willem Rodenburg

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