



Madrigalists at Prayer

Sacred Music
by the
Masters
of
Sixteenth Century Italy

Rutgers
Collegium
Musicum

Andrew Kirkman,
conductor

Timothy J. Smith,
Assistant Conductor



The motets on this disc are all the work of musicians best known for their madrigals: Luca Marenzio, the quintessential madrigalist and flower of his generation, Giaches de Wert, one of the last of the great river of northern composers who dominated Italian music-making for more than a century, and Cipriano de Rore, also from the Low Countries, one of the prime movers of the previous generation. The works presented here show sides of these composers at once familiar and less familiar: familiar in their 'madrigalisms': the frequently vivid responses to the words and occasional chromatic expressivity; less so in their often more reverent, if no less fervent, tone, more obviously in tune with the devotional environment for which they were shaped.

The career of Luca Marenzio is evidence of just how far musical talent could drive social advancement in Renaissance Italy. Born, we are told, 'of humble and poor condition', Marenzio went on to a glittering career in the courts of Roman cardinals. Like many composers of his time, he first made his way as a singer, though it is clear that he was already composing in his twenties, when he published his first madrigal. His talent as a lutenist must also have given him a digital sense of the intricate counterpoints that were to weave together some of the crowning achievements of his age. A particular high point of his career came when, in the employ of Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici, he was assigned to compose the music for two of the famous Florentine *Intermedii* of 1589, among the most important forerunners of opera. The extent of his considerable fame is revealed, for instance, in Dowland's willingness to travel from England to Rome solely for the purpose of meeting Marenzio, some of whose letters he had reproduced in his *First Book of Aires*.

Like Lassus, Giaches de Wert seems to have begun his Italian career through being taken from his native Netherlands to serve as a choirboy. Occupied for many years with the famous Gonzaga family of Mantua, his career mirrors, in its occasional turbulence, the dark and chromatic counterpoint of many of his compositions. In 1584 his wife Lucrezia,

who had earlier been embroiled in scandal through her affair with one of Wert's colleagues in Mantua, died in prison after being convicted of involvement in a plot to overthrow a minor branch of the Gonzaga family. The same period saw increasing contacts with the more liberal court of Ferrara, where Wert himself became entwined in sexual scandal through his affair with Tarquinia Molza, one of the famous singing *concerto delle dame*, an ensemble that inspired some of his most dazzling works.

Rore, who became familiar with Wert in Ferrara in the 1550s, assumed early in his career an eminence comparable to that of his younger compatriot, becoming *maestro di cappella* at the Ferrarese court in the 1540s. Like the Gonzaga court in Mantua, that of the Estes in Ferrara was one of the greatest artistic centers in sixteenth-century Italy, standing at the forefront of the newest musical developments, and it was here that Rore composed the greater part of his *oeuvre*. His fame extended far beyond Ferrara, however: one of the most sumptuous manuscripts of his motets—containing the large portrait to which we owe knowledge of his appearance—was prepared for the Munich court of Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria, and he composed works for many of the crowned heads of Europe including the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The authenticity of a number of the widespread body of motets hitherto ascribed to him, including *Fulgubunt iusti*, has recently come into question due to questions concerning attribution and style.

The opening and closing items on this disc reveal Marenzio in his little-known guise as a composer of music for double choir. Like many of his polychoral pieces, these are based on texts drawn from the Psalms. *Iniquos odio habui*, scored for two equal choirs, sets lines from Psalm 119: 'I have hated unjust thoughts, but have delighted in your law.' The two choirs answer each other in quick-fire alternation, coming together, typically, for words of supplication: 'you are my support and my guardian,' 'support me', and, finally, 'and I shall be saved.' Madrigalisms like the obsessively-circling and alternating motif on 'do not confound me' add to the deftness and wit of this

lively and invigorating work.

Wert's stunning *Transeunte Domino* presents a more plangent image of supplication through its affecting setting of the story, from Luke 18, of the blind man who calls out for mercy to the passing Christ. His ever more urgent request, in the face of the rebukes of those around him, lends a climax, with sopranos high in their range, to the first part of the motet, which tails off in a moving evocation of his repeated calls to the Saviour to 'have mercy on me' ('miserere mei'). Part 2 of the motet showcases his words to Christ—'O Lord, let me see'—in the motet's single moment of (exquisitely ornamented) homophony, before the triple-time coda brings a suitably festive conclusion as the man receives his sight.

Marenzio's *Domine quando veneris* is one of the jewels of its age, a marvel of subtly-paced and elegantly-structured counterpoint in which a master at the summit of his powers brings to bear all his extraordinary powers on what must surely be one of the most eloquent musical expressions of penitence ever devised. The text, though of unknown origin, is generic enough: a request that the Lord, when he comes to judge the earth, may have mercy on the soul of the supplicant; but it is hard not to see its setting as a deeply personal statement, especially in the repeated utterances of 'in vita mea' that crown the repeated line, 'for I have sinned much in my life,' that concludes each part of the motet.

Vox in Rama was one of Wert's most widely-distributed pieces, and it remains his most famous sacred work. Its astonishing evocation of the words, from Matthew 2, depicting Rachel's lament on the death of her children, rise out of the depths of the lowest parts of the vocal ranges to flower in a series of typical madrigalisms: homophonic undulations as the bereaved mother cries out; descending chromatic lines as she weeps. Her inconsolability receives its natural musical counterpart in the conclusion on the dominant, the music, like her grief, never to be resolved.

While the attribution of *Fulgebunt iusti* to Rore has come into question in recent years, it remains, with its vigorous, surging counterpoint, a powerful depiction of the image, from the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, of the just 'shining forth' and running 'like sparks through the stubble.'

The optimism, by turns calm and festive, with which Wert's beautiful elevation motet, *O sacrum convivium*, greets the Christ made flesh in the transubstantiated host carries through into Marenzio's motet for St Cecilia, *Cantantibus organis*. Her song to the Lord, that her heart and body may be immaculate, that she may not be confounded, receives a suitably up-beat and joyous evocation.

While ostensibly concerned with God's admonishment to the people of Zion not to fear the Assyrians, the words from Isaiah set in Wert's gentle and contemplative *Noli timere* are clearly in this context to be understood as a more general affirmation of God's protection of his children. With *Adesto dolori meo* we return to the mood of *Vox in Rama* for a tortured and chromatic evocation of grief and mourning. Here again Wert indulges in stunning madrigalisms, with the sudden effluence of brisk melismas on 'singing' ('cantatio') giving way to the sobbing descents of 'weeping' ('ploracionem').

Whereas *Iniquos odio habui* had pitted equal choirs against one another, our closing double-choir setting of *Cantate domino* sets low against high. Here again Marenzio reserves full scoring for moments of particular brilliance and word-depiction, as at 'And all the people see his glory' ('Et videant omnes gloriam eius') and 'the whole world' ('universa terra'). With the final glorious celebration of God's wonders ('mirabilia eius'), we reach the climax of our own celebration of the wonders of his sixteenth-century musical servants, with whose deeds one may imagine him to have been well pleased.

Andrew Kirkman

Andrew Kirkman studied at the universities of Durham, London (King's College) and Princeton, and has worked at the universities of Manchester, Wales and Oxford. He is currently Associate Professor in music at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, New Jersey, where he is also director of the Collegium Musicum. His professional recording group, "The Binchois Consort" has made seven recordings to date, all with Hyperion Records. Its recordings and performances, of music by Dufay, Binchois, Josquin, Busnoys and others, have received universally strong critical approbation and many music industry prizes. Kirkman's research centres on sacred music of the fifteenth century, and he has published and lectured widely on English and continental music of the period, including the music of such composers as Dufay, Ockeghem, Walter Frye and John Bedyngham. Binchois Studies, a collection of essays edited jointly with Dennis Slavin, was recently published by Oxford University Press.

Producer and engineer: Bob Sellman

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Rutgers Collegium Musicum, the early music ensemble of Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, is dedicated to the exploration of unjustly neglected repertory from the 'Golden Age' of polyphony. The ensemble, which currently comprises sixteen voices, was founded in its current form by its director, Professor Andrew Kirkman, a specialist in fifteenth-century music and director of the award-winning Binchois Consort, with which he records on Hyperion Records. Membership of Collegium includes students, alumni and faculty members, as well as members of the local community. It presents varied and interesting concert programs of early choral and instrumental music, some of them in collaboration with the instrumental music faculty and students of the Mason Gross School, at venues in New Brunswick and in the tri-state area. Concerts are currently funded by the Mason Gross Dean's Office. Collegium is also available for sponsorships, concerts and private events.

For more information on Collegium Musicum, Professor Andrew Kirkman and Mason Gross School of the Arts, please access the following sites: http://www.masongross.rutgers.edu/index_flash.html
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DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

Well-known and universally admired as some of the greatest composers of madrigals, Marenzio, Wert and Rore were also the authors of some of the most stunning motets of their age.

With this disc, Rutgers Collegium Musicum explores that legacy in performances of some of the most beautiful music of the High Renaissance. This is a recording for anyone with a love of choral music and its expressive capacity to bring out the deepest meanings of elegant texts.

Cover painting: *Holy Family*
by Giulio Cesare Procaccini
Bologna, 1574 - 1625, Milan

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Sacred Music by the Masters of Sixteenth-Century Italy

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| 1. Iniquos odio habui
(Luca Marenzio)(1553/4-1599) | 3:21 |
| 2. Transeunte Domino
(Giaches de Wert)(1535-1596) | 8:15 |
| 3. Domine, quando veneris (Luca Marenzio) | 9:43 |
| 4. Vox in Rama (Giaches de Wert) | 5:13 |
| 5. Fulgebunt iusti
(Cipriano de Rore)(1515/6-1565) | 2:16 |
| 6. O Sacrum convivium (Giaches de Wert) | 2:16 |
| 7. Cantantibus organis (Luca Marenzio) | 2:18 |
| 8. Noli timere (Giaches de Wert) | 6:17 |
| 9. Adesto dolore meo (Giaches de Wert) | 4:39 |
| 10. Cantate Domino (Luca Marenzio) | 3:53 |

Producer & engineer: Bob Sellman
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