



Chapelle du Roi

director: *Alistair Dixon*

Agony and Ecstasy

Music of the Song of Solomon & The Sibylline Prophecies

One of the great riches of our 16th century musical legacy is the sheer diversity of musical styles that composers developed and used in their compositions. Even now the proportion of the repertoire that audiences hear in concert and on CD is so small that this variety is hardly appreciated and the popular view of 16th century music might be that it is summed up by a Palestrina mass setting!

In this programme we contrast two extremes of 16th century music - the agony of Gesualdo and Lassus and the Ecstasy of music composed on texts from the Song of Solomon.

Don Carlo Gesualdo (c.1566-1613), prince of Venosa was born into an old and noble Neapolitan family. His wife had an affair with the Duke of Andria and in 1590 Gesualdo arranged for the brutal murder of the couple and the public display of the mutilated bodies. It seems that he remained tortured by this act and the fear of eternal damnation for the rest of his life. His music conveys this sense disturbed unrest being characterised by unconventional cadences, exaggerated rhetorical devices, ambiguous successions of chords, and a free mixture of counterpoint and homophony.

Orlando di Lassus spent most of his productive life in the employment of Duke Albrecht. It is evident from his correspondence that he was a cultured man, skilled in many languages, but also that he suffered from bouts of "melancholy" - or depression. His setting of the Sibylline Prophecies was presumably composed during such a period. Lassus expresses the text with the immediacy of renaissance rhetoric, while the continually shifting pitch-centres prepare the listener for the bizarre mixture of pagan hysteria and Christian epigram which are to come.

Canticum Canticorum Salomonis - the Song of Songs - comes between the Old Testament books of Ecclesiastes and Isaiah and is a collection of very beautiful and erotic verse. It celebrates in astonishingly frank and fresh terms the delights of physical love.

With its rich imagery of nature - trees, fruits, Spring, gardens - the Song of Solomon has been a rich mine for generations of composers seeking texts. The imagery and human dimension of the Song of Solomon inspired composers to write music which speaks directly to the emotions and sensibilities of its listeners.

Programme

Prophetiae Sibyllarum (c.1555) - Orlando di Lassus
- *Carmina Chromatico*
- *Sibylla Persica*
- *Sibylla Libyca*
- *Sibylla Delphica*
- *Sibylla Agrippa*

Cantiones Sacrae - Gesualdo
- *Laboravi in genitu meo*
- *O vos omnes*
- *O crux benedicta*

Francisco Guerrero
- *Trahe me post te, Virgo Maria*

Canticum Canticorum Salomonis
- Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina
- *Osculetur me*
- *Nigra Sum*
- *Si ignoras te*
- *Vineam meam non custodivi*

Rodrigo Ceballos
Hortus conclusus

Gabriel Jackson
I am the Rose of Sharon



Ibi Dabo Tibi from *Canticum Canticorum Salomonis* - Eric Gill

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