

Concert presented by the South African Early Music Trust (SAEMT)

Sunday, 25 September 2016, 16h00,

Lutheran Church, 98 Strand Street Cape Town

# Polychoral Splendour

works by Lassus, Gabrieli, Schütz & Praetorius

Orlandus Lassus  
(ca. 1532-1594)

Musica dei donum  
Sacred Song for six voices  
from *Cantiones Sacrae a 6 vocibus* (1594)

Giovanni Gabrieli  
(ca. 1555 – 1612)

Plaudite, psallite omnis terra (Ch. 41)  
Motet for three antiphonal choirs  
from *Sacrae Symphoniae I* (1597)

Heinrich Schütz  
(1585 – 1672)

Jauchzet dem Herrn alle Welt (SWV 36)  
Psalm setting for two antiphonal choirs & bc  
from *Psalmen Davids*, op. 2 (1619)

Michael Praetorius  
(1571 – 1621)

Es stehn für Gottes Throne  
Choral Concert from *Polyhymnia Puericinium* (1621)

Heinrich Schütz

O bone Jesu (SWV 471)  
Motet for soloists, choir (SSAATTB),  
instrumental consort & bc (1666?)

- Interval -

Giovanni Gabrieli

Canzon Prima à cinque  
from *Canzoni et Sonate* (1615)

Giovanni Gabrieli

In Ecclesiis  
Motet for soloist choir, capell-choir,  
obligato instruments & bc (1608)

Michael Praetorius

Missa gantz Teudsch: Kyrie und Gloria mit Sinfonien,  
German Mass for SSATB soloists, three antiphonal vocal choirs,  
two instrumental choirs & bc  
from *Polyhymnia Panegyrica et Caduceatrix* (1619)

Heinrich Schütz

Alleluja! Lobet den Herren in seinem Heiligtum (SWV 38)  
Psalm setting for two antiphonal choirs, two full choirs & bc  
from *Psalmen Davids*, op. 2 (1619)

*Stellenbosch High School Senior Choir – o.l.v. Xander Kritzinger*  
*Cape Town Chamber Choir – directed by Marijke Roos*  
*Cape Consort – directed by Hans Huyssen*

# Cape Consort

Antoinette Blyth, Lente Louw – soprano  
Monika Voysey, Vasti Knoessen – alto  
Willem Bester, Warren Vernon-Driscoll – tenor  
Keaton Manwaring, Sean Bethell – baritone  
Caroline Walters, Darryn Prinsloo – recorders  
Annie Shaw, Manu Huyssen – Baroque violin  
Ben Raoncier\* – cornetto  
Ryan Kierman, Nick Green, Leeroy Simpson – sackbuts  
Gerhard Benade – dulcian  
Erik Dippenaar – organ  
Hans Huyssen – musical direction

\* Cape Consort student-cadet with kind support of the Claude Leon Foundation

## Programme Notes

This program of music by Lassus, Gabrieli, Schütz and Praetorius traces a line in the development of polychoral music that runs from Bavaria to Italy and back to North Germany. This most sumptuous form of musical expression was popular for a relatively short period of time before and after 1600. It therefore straddles the transition of what we now call Renaissance to Baroque styles. In fact, its conception may be considered an important impulse in this stylistic transition.

Whereas Renaissance music is often considered a mathematical art – its rule-based, intrinsic constructions almost more important than the sonic results of such devices – Baroque music is all about the actual sounding and, with that, the emotional impact of music. Renaissance counterpoint can be described as the art of binding together seemingly independent lines and as such requires transparent textures and a close collaboration of all involved – also in a spatial sense. A universe of ideas and more or less hidden references may unfold within the music, but arguably only for those learned or patient enough to decipher them. Lassus's *Musica Dei*, the first piece on our program, is a good example of such a finely woven web of musical ideas – a most beautiful, but essentially closed work.

In stark contrast Gabrieli's *Plaudite* demonstrates an overt Baroque approach. All linear contrapuntal craftsmanship is sacrificed in favour of an almost external juxtaposition of blocks of sounds produced by different choirs. This idea of different groups singing in alternation would gradually evolve into the *concertato* style, which subsequently led to characteristically dramatic Baroque forms, such as the concerto (including the concerto grosso or the chorale concerto) and the cantata.

An strong case can therefore be made for the theory that composer's responses to the acoustical challenges posed by large architectural structures played a decisive role in the development of what have since become known as typical Baroque features. However, one of the first accounts of a series of truly polychoral performances is more related to the demonstration of political power and social status than to any architectural considerations. It is that of the royal Bavarian wedding of 1568 at the court of Albert V in Munich.

Albert ('the Generous') was an extraordinary musical patron. His court orchestra, the famous *Münchner Hofkapelle*, was most generously endowed and accordingly ranked as one of the best in Europe – especially after Lassus, then regarded as Europe's foremost musicians, was appointed as its director in 1556. Historians regard the festivities celebrating Albert's son William's wedding to Renata of Lorraine as one of 'the most lavish events in the entire sixteenth century'.

From a participating court musician's accounts we know of the performance of a concerto for 24 voices with three 8-part choirs, consisting of 'eight violas da gambe, eight violas da braccio & eight different instruments: that is a Bassoon, a Cornamuse, a mute Cornetto, an alto Cornetto, a large curved Cornetto, a Flute a Dulcian, A Trombone, a Bass ... played once without voices and afterwards, with parts for eight sonorous voices by Messer Orlando, was given once more.' But, even topping this, a motet in forty parts by Alessandro Striggio, which was performed on the side during dinner, featured 'eight Trombones, eight violas da gambe, eight bass recorders, a

harpsichord and a large Lute; all the rest the voices supplied, and it was given three times, with the greatest attention.'

Not long after this event Giovanni Gabrieli arrives in Munich to study with Lassus, who significantly influences the development of Gabrieli's style. It is therefore hardly surprising that soon after Gabrieli's return to Venice, where he is appointed as organist at the *Basicala di San Marco* and the *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, reports of similarly splendid musical performances at these two centres emanate. In fact, San Rocco, as the most wealthy Venetian confraternity, can afford to employ Italy's most renowned singers and instrumentalists and – in healthy rivalry with San Marco's long-standing musical establishment – contributes significantly to elevation of Venice as prime musical centre.

An example of such a raving report is that of Thomas Coryat, an English traveller and writer. After attending a festive sermon in San Rocco in 1608 he writes:

'This feast consisted principally of Musicke, which was both vocall and instrumental, so good, so delectable, so rare, so admirable, so superexcellent, that it did even ravish and stupifie all those strangers that never heard the like... For mine owne part I can say this, that I was for the time even rapt up with Saint Paul into the third heaven. Sometimes there sung sixteene or twenty men together, having their master or moderator to keepe them in order; and when they sung, the instrumental musitians played also. Sometimes sixteene played together upon their instruments, ten Sagbuts, foure Cornets, and two Violdegambas of an extraordinary greatness ; sometimes tenne, sixe Sagbuts and foure Beautiful Cornets ; sometimes two, a Cornet and a treble violl. Of those treble viols I heard three severall there, whereof each was so good, especially one that I observed above the rest, that I never heard the like before.'

Venice's status as extraordinary musical centre soon attracts performing and studying musicians from all over Europe. One of the first Germans to arrive is Heinrich Schütz who, after first studying law in Marburg, spends three far more formative years in Venice, studying music with Gabrieli from 1609-1612. Not long after his return to Germany he finds employment as director the *Dresdner Hofkapelle*, yet another prominent German orchestra. Dedicated to his employer Johann Georg I, elector of Saxony, Schütz's first publication for Dresden is his collection of *Psalms of David*, consisting of 26 large-scale psalm settings 'for eight or more voices plus two further choirs so that they may be performed with three or four choirs', which clearly indicate the Venetian influence, as well as the luxurious resources to his avail upon his arrival in Dresden. *Jauchzet dem Herrn alle Welt* and *Alleluja! Lobet ihn in seiner großen Herrlichkeit* stem from this collection and portray a youthfully inspired composer applying the sonic grandeur of catholic Venetian music to German psalms, thereby laying the foundations of what was to become an extremely rich tradition of protestant church music.

Unfortunately conditions at court – and in Germany at large – would deteriorate rapidly: During the Thirty Year's War that lasted from 1618 to 1648 and decimated Germany's population by a third, cultural activities gradually declined to most humble levels. Even at a rich court as in Dresden, Schütz was never able to resort to the large forces of his early polychoral works again. However, taking account of the circumstances he adapted his compositional style and nevertheless found ways of attaining highly evocative musical expressions using much smaller forces. The free-standing motet *O bone Jesu*, composed almost 40 years after the *Psalms of David*, aptly demonstrates the difference of approach, yet at the same time shows the consistence of expressive and poetic quality of all of Schütz's music.

Michael Praetorius serves at the North German court of Wolfenbüttel, where he is also the organist at the town's famous *Beatae Mariae Virginis* cathedral. But from 1613 onwards he is also responsible for the festive music at special events at the court in Dresden. Hence for a few years Praetorius and Schütz collaborate occasionally. Without doubt the Italian novelties brought to Praetorius's attention by his younger colleague make a huge impression. While most of Praetorius's large musical output can be regarded as meticulously crafted, yet somewhat artistically restricted occasional music, he suddenly produces several large-scale and largely conceived works in the last years of his life.

A good example of the former, educational and instructive category is the chorale concerto *Es stehn für Gottes Throne*, specifically written to include and feature youthful voices. Representative for the latter category the *Missa gantz Teudsch* stands out as a rare masterpiece, demonstrating the 48-year old composer at the height of the latest Italian trends. In scoring the work for five distinct choirs, including some virtuoso passagework for the two violins, Praetorius here even surpasses Schütz and Gabrieli in sonic splendour and exuberance. Works like these certainly seem to justify a reassessment of a composer, who is otherwise mostly known for his contribution of countless four-part choral settings that for a while were the stock repertoire of protestant church choirs.

Hans Huyssen