



Palestrina

Aeterna Christi Munera
Missa l'Homme Armé à 5
Peccantem Me Quotidie
Stabat Mater

Pro Cantione
Antiqua

alto

Both the Masses on this recording are 'paraphrase' Masses; that is to say, they take existing monodic material and treat it polyphonic ally. The first of the two, *Aeterna Christi munera*, is based on the matins hymn for the Common of the Apostles, variations of which date back to the 12th century. Palestrina closely follows the syllabic version known to him, and its three themes occur in all voices throughout the Mass; the first in *Kyrie* I, *Sanctus*, at 'Hosanna' and in the *Agnus Dei*, the second at 'Christe eleison', 'Domine Deus' and in the *Benedictus*, and the third in *Kyrie* II and at 'Pleni sunt caeli'. Moreover, the ABCA form of the hymn is echoed in the Mass. The *Sanctus*, for instance, doubles that form, the 'Hosanna' representing the return of A, and the second BC the trio 'Benedictus'. The second 'Hosanna' is an extended and more elaborate version of the same material used in the first, a feature which also occurs in the (later) four-part *L'homme armé* Mass.

Missa Aeterna Christi munera was published in 1590 in the fifth book of Masses, and its ingenuity, clarity and simplicity epitomise the refinement of Palestrina's late works. It is also extremely beautiful, and reminds us that in his letters to Duke Gonzago, Palestrina repeatedly stresses the importance of the *sound* of the music. It is a short Mass; the *Credo*, despite the length of the text, is, as musicologist Jerome Roche has pointed out, not much longer than a lengthy motet. This brevity is partly achieved by repeated overlapping of words, a feature also of the *Gloria*, and through much fugal treatment which further emphasises the strong thematic links. If Palestrina's Masses were once described as vocal symphonies (he wrote no instrumental music), this is very much a string quartet, and one that has excited the attention of other composers, from Palestrina's contemporaries to Beethoven and Debussy. Henry Coates has even suggested that Wagner's intensive study of the work in Dresden led to the beginnings of his development of the *leitmotiv* system.

Other writers have noted the way Palestrina's fugal techniques have influenced those of later composers, such as Bach in his Chorale Preludes, though, unlike Bach, Palestrina's expositions present a series of related ideas rather than the development of one idea. Above all, however, Palestrina's inspiration, the balance and symmetry of his work, springs from his deep familiarity with and understanding of his texts. He set the ordinary so many times (105 published Masses) that the liturgy became less a restrictive framework than a constructive musical element, so that the words became phonetic material upon which he lavished his skill and imagination.

Stravinsky, writing about his own setting of the Latin text of *Oedipus Rex*, puts it precisely: *The composer can concentrate all his attention on the primary constituent element of the text, that is to say, on the syllable. Was not this method of treating the text that of the old masters of austere style? This, too, has for centuries been the Church's attitude towards music and has prevented it from falling into sentimentalism and, consequently, into individualism.*'

Palestrina's understanding and love of plainchant clearly shows in the textural quality of his melodic writing, which is a perfect and subtle match of verbal and musical accentuation, to the extent that bar-lines are sometimes a barrier to a full appreciation of his achievement. Many times he based his Masses and motets on plainsong, but he also occasionally used secular material, and the two *L'homme armé* Masses are the best known examples. The five-part Mass recorded here was published in his third book of Masses (1570)

Palestrina wrote 7 masses in the relatively old-fashioned 'tenor' from, the music being built around a *cantus firmus*, usually plainsong, and *L'homme Armé* is probably the best known example. The tune he used had been popular since about 1450 and there are at least 31 masses based upon it, ranging from those of Dufay and Ockeghem to the elaborate 12 voice setting by Carissimi. Palestrina himself used it again in a 4 part paraphrase mass of 1582. The original text, which appears in a late 15th century Naples manuscript together with 6 anonymous mass settings, seems to refer to a crusade against the Turks; '*Fear the armed man; word has gone out that everyone should arm himself with a hauberk of mail*'. Whatever its origins, however, the melody was ideal material for polyphonic elaboration, strong, simple and symmetrical. Palestrina seized the opportunity brilliantly and constructed a masterpiece from an apparently rigid formula. Like the *Missa Assumpta est Maria* it is in the Mixolydian mode, and the appearance of the melody not only in the cantus firmus but in canonic fragments elsewhere, such as the beginning of the *Agnus Dei*, gives the work an architectural unity as well as showing how many different groupings and sonorities Palestrina can devise from one short tune.

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Almost every book about Palestrina, every article and history, seems to be at pains to tell us that, famous though they may be, the *Marcellus Mass* and *Stabat mater* are not necessarily Palestrina's finest works. This seems to be a case of swinging the pendulum against the time-

honoured mythology that has been attached to these masterpieces. Of course, Palestrina wrote many works as great as these. On the grand scale there are the masses *Ecce ego Joannes* and *Assumpta est Maria*- the popular and practical masses *Aeterna Christi munera* (here) and *Brevis* (ALC 1178), and the splendid motets like *Super Flumina Babylonis*, *Sicut Cervus* (both also on ALC 1178) and *Surge et Illuminare* all bear witness to Palestrina's superlative art.

But why not a bit of mythology and mystery? And while we are at it, why not a new look at performing Palestrina? Why not savour the extraordinary power of this music to reach across the centuries and withstand all kinds of interpretations? Why not try to go back to the music as though it had just been written; written to be sung, right now, for the first time by singers who not only knew the composer but were his companions? Obviously, it would be foolish to claim for any modern performance some special insight or some right to the support of the new deity called *Authenticity*. It is good, though, to clean the hallowed grime from a masterpiece every now and then. And Palestrina did not know of 'doves' cooing in the Gothic fan-vaults.

Palestrina never published his *Stabat mater*. Burney and then Vincent Novello got it into print and made this Papal treasure accessible. It was probably written in the last 10 years of Palestrina's life and copied into the Sistine Chapel choir-books around 1590. As a setting of liturgical Latin it remains unsurpassed.

The motets represent Palestrina in rather subdued moods. The more famous is the poignant and lamenting Lenten motet *Peccantem me Quotidie*. This work reminds musical historians that Palestrina's true precursor in Rome was Morales. This work could even be attributed to the last years of the Spaniard if we did not know its real authorship. There is a great and severe dignity beyond the plangent suspensions which calls to mind the great *Lamentabatur Jacob* of Morales. Palestrina's genius stamps the last page with a gentle feeling of hope, *et salva me*. Subtle touches like this within the framework of Renaissance polyphony are what make Palestrina the ultimate inheritor of the great master Josquin.

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Pro Cantione Antiqua began in 1968 as a vocal group intent on singing music from the medieval, Renaissance and Baroque eras. It was founded by Mark Brown, Paul Esswood and James Griffett who met while singing at Westminster Cathedral under Colin Mawby. They were soon joined by

Michael George, Ian Partridge, Kevin Smith, Brian Etheridge and Paul Elliot, each of whom were to go on to become soloists in their own right. Since then several other well-known singers have, from time to time, been members of this group whose recorded repertoire gradually expanded to take in music of periods somewhat later than originally intended. . Bruno Turner became associated with the group as adviser and was, many times, a guest conductor.

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1. Hymn:

AETERNA CHRISTI MUNERA

Aeterna Christi munera, apostolorum gloriam, laudes
canentes debitas, iactis canamus mentibus.

Ecclesiarum principes, belli triumphales duces, coelestis
aulae milites, et vera mundi lumina.

MISSA AETERNA CHRISTI MUNERA

2. Introitus: Mihi autem

Mihi autem nimis honorati sunt amici tui Deus:
nimis confortatus est principatus eorum.

Ps. Domine probasti me et cognovisti me:
tu cognovisti sessionem meam, et resurrectionem
meam. Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto:
sicut erat in principio, et nunc et Semper, et in
saecula saeculorum. Amen.

*Your friends, O God, I hold in great honour;
their power is very great.*

*Ps. Lord, you have tested me and know me:
you know my sitting down, and my standing up.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the
beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.*

3. Kyrie

4. Gloria

5. Graduale: Constitues eos principes

Constitues eos principes super omnem terram:
memores erunt nominis tui, Domine.

V. Pro patribus tuis nati sunt tibi filii:
propterea populi confitebuntur tibi.

*You will make them princes over all the world:
they will remember your name, O Lord.*

V. Sons are born to you instead of your fathers;
therefore the nations will give you honour.

6. Credo

7. Offertorium: Mihi autem

Mihi autem nimis honorati sunt amici tui Deus:
nimis confortatus est principatus eorum.

*Your friends, O God, I hold in great honour;
their power is very great.*

8. Sanctus

9. Benedictus

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.

Hosanna in excelsis.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

10. Communio: Venite post me

Venite post me: faciam vos piscatores hominum:

at illi, relictis retibus et navi, secuti sunt Dominum.

'Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'

So they left their nets and boats, and followed the Lord.

11. Agnus Dei

12. STABAT MATER

Stabat Mater dolorosa,

Juxta crucem lacrimosa,

Dum pendebat filius.

Cuius animam gementem

Contristantem et dolentem

Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta

Fuit illa benedicta

Mater Unigeniti;

Quæ morebat et dolebat

Et tremebat, cum videbat

Nati pœnas incliti.

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 suæ gentis

Vidit Jesum in tormentis

Et flagellis subditum.

Vidit suum dulcem natum

Morientem desolatum

Dum. emisit spiritum.

Eia Mater fons amoris

Me sentire vim doloris

Fac, ut tecum lugeam.

Fac ut ardeat cor meum

In amando Christum Deum

Ut sibi complaceam.

Sancta Mater istud agas:

Crucifixi fige plagas,

Cordi meo valide.

Tui nati vulnerati,

Tam dignati pro me pati,

Pœnas mecum divide.

Fac me vere tecum flere

Crucifixo condolere

Donec ego vixero

Juxta crucem tecum stare

Te libenter sociare

In planctu desidero.

Virgo, virginum præclara,

Mihi jam non sis amara,

Fac me tecum plangere.

Fac ut portern Christi mortem

Passionis ejus sortem,

Et plagas recolare.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,

Cruce hac inebriari

Ob amorem Filii.

Inflammatum et accensum

Per te, Virgo, sim defensum

In die judicii.

Fac me cruce custodiri

Morte Christi præmuniri

Confoveri gratia:

Quando corpus morietur

Fac ut animæ donetur

Paradisi gloria.

MISSA L'HOMME ARME - 5 vv

13. Kyrie

14. Gloria

15. Credo

16. Sanctus & Benedictus

17. Agnus Dei

18. PECCANTUM ME QUOTIDIE

et non penitentem,

Timor mortis conturbat me.

Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio.

Miserere mei, Deus, et salva me.

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ALC 1018 The Art of Alfred Deller / highlights from his classic Vanguard recordings

ALC 1029 Sviridov: Choral Music: 3 Choruses Pushkin's Garland, Troubled Times etc

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Giovanni Pierluigi da PALESTRINA (1525-94)

Pro Cantione Antiqua (Personnel follow):

Aeterna Christi Munera Countertenors: Michael Chance, Timothy Penrose; Tenors: James Griffett, James Lewington, Ian Partridge; Baritones & Basses: Brian Etheridge, Michael George, Adrian Peacock, Stephen Roberts; Conductor: Mark Brown; Recorded at St.Jude's, Hampstead, 1992 (Producer: Mark Brown; Engineer: Antony Howell-as for **L'homme Armé à 5**)

Stabat Mater / Motet Countertenors: Paul Esswood, Timothy Penrose, Kevin Smith; Tenors: James Griffett, Ian Partridge; Baritones: Gordon Jones, Stephen Roberts; Basses: Michael George, Brian Etheridge, Adrian Peacock; Conductor: Bruno Turner; Recorded at St. Alban's Church, Brook Street, London, 1980

Missa L'homme Armé à 5 vocum Countertenors: Charles Brett, Timothy Penrose, Ashley Stafford; Tenor: Wynford Evans, James Griffett, Ian Partridge; Baritones & Basses: Michael George, Gordon Jones, Christopher Keyte, Stephen Roberts; Conductor: Mark Brown; Recorded at All Hallows Church, Gospel Oak, London, 19-22 February 1990

[1] Hymn: Aeterna Christi Munera	2:31
Missa Aeterna Christi Munera	[29:44]
[2] Introitus: <i>Mihi Autem</i>	2:31
[3] <i>Kyrie</i>	2:02
[4] <i>Gloria</i>	2:47
[5] Graduale: <i>Constitutes eos principes</i>	5:49
[6] <i>Credo</i>	5:00
[7] Offertorium: <i>Mihi autem</i>	1:47
[8] <i>Sanctus</i>	1:52
[9] <i>Benedictus</i>	2:15
[10] Communio: <i>Venite post me</i>	0:56
[11] <i>Agnus Dei</i>	4:39
[12] Stabat Mater	9:33
Missa L'Homme Armé à 5 vocum	[31:01]
[13] <i>Kyrie</i>	3:47
[14] <i>Gloria</i>	6:22
[15] <i>Credo</i>	8:23
[16] <i>Sanctus & Benedictus</i>	7:14
[17] <i>Agnus Dei I & II</i>	5:13
[18] Motet: Peccantem Me Quotidie	4:34

TOTAL TIME 77:25 Licensed from PCA, Yorkshire

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