



Rossini
Petite Messe Solennelle

Basle Madrigalist Choir

Basel Madrigalisten

Director: Fritz Näf

alto

Gioachino Rossini was 71 years old when he started to compose his *Petite messe solennelle*. By that time - the summer of 1863 - he had been living 'in retirement' in Paris for nearly seven years and had not composed an opera for over 30 or completed a large choral work for about 20 years. (The last of his many operas, *Guillaume Tell*, had had its first performance in August 1829 and his *Stabat Mater*, begun in 1831, had its premiere on 7 January 1842.)

Soon after taking up permanent residence in Paris, Rossini and his second wife, Olympe Pélissier, had instituted a series of *samedi soirs* at their apartment in the rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. The guests on these Saturday evenings included composers such as Verdi, Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Meyerbeer and Liszt, famous singers, pianists and violinists and various other friends of theirs. Much of the music played at these gatherings was, needless to say, by Rossini - by then he was mainly composing small instrumental pieces and songs which he called his *péchés de vieillesse* (sins of old age) - but Mozart, Haydn and Pergolesi pieces were also represented as were some of the latest compositions by selected visitors. (On one occasion he included the *Tarantelle for flute and clarinet* by the young Saint-Saëns but amused himself by giving the impression he had written it himself until, that is, everyone had sycophantically praised it to the skies when he pointed out the real composer.)

Of the singers who frequented his salon, two of Rossini's favourites were the Marchisio sisters. They had delighted the composer when they made their Paris debut in 1860 in his opera *Semiramide* and, on Good Friday of the following year, Rossini had invited them to take part in a scaled-down performance of the *Stabat Mater*: When he came to compose his *Petite messe solennelle*, for twelve voices, two pianos and harmonium, some two years later, the solo parts for soprano and contralto were intended from the start for 'my beloved friends and incomparable interpreters, Carlotta and Barbara Marchisio, possessors of that song which is sensed in the soul'. On the autograph score of this work Rossini, referring to the musicians needed for its performance, indicated that 'twelve singers of three sexes - men, women and castrati - will be sufficient for its execution: that is, eight for the chorus, four for the solos, a total of twelve cherubim'. Another note on the score, this one addressed to the Almighty, reads as follows: 'Dear God, there you have it, finished, this poor little mass. Is it really sacred music [la musique sacrée] or is it cursed music [la sacrée musique] that I have made? I was born for *opera buffa*, as you well know! Little technique, a little heart, that is all. So be Thou blessed and grant me Paradise.'

The first performance of this 'poor little mass' took place on 14 March 1864 in a private chapel owned by the Countess Louise Pillet-Will to whom the work is dedicated. (The Countess' father-in-law had been a great friend and staunch supporter of Rossini for many years.) Apart from the Marchisio sisters, those taking part included the tenor, Italo Gardoni, the Belgian bass, Louis Agniez, and eight singers from the Paris Conservatoire carefully chosen by its Director, Daniel Auber. During the performance, Rossini stood beside the principal pianist, Georges Mathias, indicating the tempo and turning the pages. The audience was enthusiastic if small and select. Meyerbeer was especially effusive in his praise of the work and attended another performance the following day. 'Will his health permit these emotions?' wondered Rossini. It would seem that it did not for within seven weeks Meyerbeer was dead. (In his honour, Rossini composed a short piece for male chorus and drum and Meyerbeer's nephew wrote a funeral march. It is said, and Verdi apparently liked repeating the story, that when Rossini was shown a score of this march he mischievously remarked: 'Excellent, but wouldn't it have been better if you had died and your uncle had written the march?')

Rossini would have liked to have had his *Petite messe solennelle* performed in a Roman Catholic Church but, at that time, there was Papal bull forbidding performances by mixed choirs in such buildings. Not even his correspondence with Liszt, who had recently taken up minor orders, nor his direct appeal to the Pope could revoke this prohibition. What he could do, however, was to prevent anyone else from making money out of orchestrating the mass by doing so himself. He worked at this version (which leaves out the *Preludio religioso*) in 1867 but it was not until 24 February 1869, a year after the composer's death, that it received its first performance at the Théâtre-Italien. By then Rossini's widow had sold the rights of the mass to the impresario Maurice Strakosch who, after giving several performances in Paris, took it on tour to places as far afield as Russia and Australia.

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Fritz Näf was born in Switzerland in October 1943 and studied singing at the conservatories in both Zürich and Friburg-im-Breisgau. He later attended masterclasses in New York with the mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel and with the tenors Ernst Haefliger and Kurt Equiluz, in Munich and Stuttgart respectively. Having performed as a tenor throughout Europe for some time, he resumed his studies in order to become a choral and orchestral conductor. From 1976-86, he taught singing and vocal ensemble at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis where, in 1978, he founded the Basler

Madrigalisten. In the mid-1980s he was appointed Director of the Musikhochschule in Winterthur and then went on to head the newly-established Conservatory of Music and Drama in Zürich. In collaboration with that city's Tonhalle Orchestra, he founded the Swiss Chamber Choir in 1997, becoming its full-time artistic director three years later. He has also been the guest conductor for many orchestras, including that of Radio della Svizzera Italiana, the Concerto Köln and the Chamber of Orchestra of Kiev, and of several choirs, notably the Choeur de Radio France.

The **Basler Madrigalisten** is a vocal ensemble comprising, at any one time, between four and 24 singers and is equally at home in music of all periods; from the Renaissance to the present day. This group specializes, however, in early music - madrigals and songs of the 16th and 17th centuries - and contemporary music, especially newly commissioned works. It has toured in practically every European country and has also visited Russia, the USA, Lebanon and the Far East. A particular highlight was the invitation to attend the Fourth World Symposium on Choral Music and World Choral Festival which took place in Sydney during 1996. This led to concerts not only in the Sydney Opera House but in Brisbane and then in Hong Kong and South Korea. The ensemble has taken part in broadcasts on radio and television and has made a series of recordings for CD, several of which have gone on to win prestigious awards.

Soloists:

Martina Musacchio, Soprano

Claudia Bandera, Alto

Guillermo Domínguez, Tenor

Johannes Mannov, Bass ,

Ulrich Koella, 1st Piano

Nigel Clayton, 2nd Piano

Peter Solomon, Harmonium

Harmonium loaned by Mason

& Hamlin (Baujahr c.1890).

Restorer: Kurt Fuchs,

Hauptstraße 9 CH-4402

Frenkendorf

Flügel Steinway & Sons

von Musik Hug,Basel

BASLE MADRIGAL CHOIR

Sopranos

Francine Acolas

Dora Luginbühl

Monika Sauder-Jetter

Director: FRITZ NÄF

Tenors

Frank Bossert

Dietmar Ens

Felix Lanz

Barbara Schneebeli Hans
Jacqueline Treichler
Cornelia Wermelinger
Regula Zimmerli
Altos
Christina Aeschbach
Jeannette Amann-Hennemann
Anna Brugnoli
Sue Christie
Gabrielle-M. Fontana
Brigitte Morf-Schori
Christa Mosimann
Almut Schuster

Jörg Mammel
Roland Niederberger
Martin Ohm
Mathias Schlächter
Basses
Christoph Büscher
Vincent Girardin
Philipp Heizmann
Hans-Martin Jetter
Walter Rüegeegger
Kari Senn
Othmar Sturm

***alto* = a label of Musical Concepts: www.musicalconcepts.net
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Project Co-ordinator: Robin Vaughan (musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk)

Alto is developing choral music within it's wide catalogue, including 'Medieval Christmas' (1004), Allegrì Miserere etc (1085) and Palestrina favourites (1061), Lassus Requiem (1124) (all by Pro Cantione Antiqua); Sviridov (secular Russian) 1029; Gretchaninov Liturgy (1069) etc

[1] I. Kyrie (Choir)

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

[2] II. Gloria (All)

Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Et in terra pax hominibus
bonae voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
Adoramus te.
Glorificamus te.

[3] Gratias agimus tibi
(Alto, Tenor Bass)

Gratias agimus tibi propter
magnam gloriam tuam.

[4] Domine Deus (Tenor)

Domine Deus, Rex coelestis.
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine Fili unigenite,
Jesu Christe. Domine Deus,
Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

[5] Qui tollis peccata mundi
(Soprano & Alto)

Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.

[6] Quoniam tu solus sanctus (Bass)

Quoniam tu solus Sanctus.
Tu solus Dominus.
Tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe.

[7] Cum sancto spiritu (Choir)

Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.
Amen.

[8] III. Credo (All)

Credo in unum Deum.
Patrem omnipotentem,
Factorem coeli et terrae,
visibilem omnium et invisibilem.
Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum,
Filius Dei unigenitum.
Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero, Genitum,
non factum, consubstantialem Patrie:
per quem omnia facta sunt.

Qui propter nos homines et
propter nostram salutem
descendit de coelis.
Et incarnatus est de
Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine:
Et homo factus est.

[9] Crucifixus (Soprano)

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis:
sub Pontio Pilato passus,
et sepultus est.

[10] Et resurrexit (All)

Et resurrexit tertia die,
secundum Scripturas. Credo.
Et ascendit in coelum:
sedet ad dexteram Patris.
Et iterum venturus est cum gloria
iudicare vivos et mortuos:
cuius regni non erit finis.
Et in Spiritum Sanctum,
Dominum vivificantem:
qui ex Patre Filioque procedit.
Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et
glorificatur: qui locutus est per Prophetas.
Et unam sanctam Catholicam et
Apostolicam Ecclesiam. Credo.
Confiteor unum baptisma in remissionem
peccatorum.

Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum.
Credo.
Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen.
In unum Deum credo.

[11] IV. Preludio religioso (Harmonium)

[12] V. Sanctus (All)

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus,
Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictas qui venit
in nomine Domini.

[13] VI. O salutaris (Soprano)

O salutaris hostia,
Quae coeli pandis ostium
Bella premunt hostilia,
Da robur, fer auxilium.

[14] VII. Agnus dei (Alto, Choir) 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.

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI (1792-1868)

Basel Madrigal Choir / Fritz Näf

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| [1] Kyrie (<i>Andante maestoso</i>) | 5:50 (All) |
| [2] Gloria (<i>Allegro maestoso</i>) | 2:53 (All) |
| [3] Gratias (<i>Andante grazioso</i>) | 4:43 (Contralto/tenor/bass) |
| [4] Domine Deus (<i>Allegro giusto</i>) | 5:28 (All) |
| [5] Qui tollis (<i>Andantino</i>) | 6:45 (All) |
| [6] Quoniam (<i>Allegro moderato</i>) | 4:48 (All) |
| [7] Cum Sancto Spiritu (<i>Allegro maestoso</i>) | 5:41 (All) |
| [8] Credo (<i>Allegro cristiano</i>) | 4:19 (All) |
| [9] Crucifixus (<i>Andantino sostenuto</i>) | 3:46 (Soprano) |
| [10] Et resurrexit (<i>Allegro</i>) | 8:52 (All) |
| [11] Preludio religioso (<i>Andante maestoso</i>) | 7:51 (Harmonium) |
| [12] Sanctus (<i>Andantino mosso</i>) | 4:31 (All) |
| [13] O salutaris (<i>Andante mosso</i>) | 5:37 (Soprano) |
| [14] Agnus Dei (<i>Largo</i>) | 7:50 (All) |

Total Time 79:00

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