

# Introduction

## THE COMPOSER

Eclipsed both during his life and after his death by the fame of Jean-Baptiste Lully, Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634?—1704) was nevertheless the musical peer of his great rival. While Lully, who was Superintendent of Music for King Louis XIV, concentrated on ballet and opera, Charpentier turned especially to composition for the church. Most of his works — more than 500 in all — are motets, oratorios, sacred cantatas, hymns, anthems, and mass settings.

Charpentier was trained as a composer in Rome under the great cantata and oratorio composer Giacomo Carissimi. On his return to Paris, Charpentier became composer for the private musical retinue of the wealthy and pious Marie de Lorraine, Duchesse de Guise, and later for the most important Jesuit church in Paris. He also wrote for the theater of Molière. Near the end of his life he was appointed by the King to the directorship of music at the Sainte-Chapelle, second only to the chapel at Versailles as the center of the royal court's religious music.

## THE WORK

*In Nativitatem D[omini] N[o]stri J[esu] C[hr]isti Canticum* is best defined as an oratorio. *Canticum* means, literally, "song" (thus our English title is an almost exact translation of the original Latin). In another sense, *canticum* means "dramatic scene," with a musical accompaniment implied. And, in the 17th century, *canticum* was used as an equivalent to "motet," a vague term at best but one which in Charpentier's time meant a vocal composition to a Latin text that could be used in a religious service. Music, drama, religion — these are the constants of oratorio throughout its history, regardless of other variables.

*Song of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ* is typical of Charpentier's music in its combination of Italian and French traits.

The work is partly in the tradition of the Biblical oratorios of Carissimi and of the earlier oratorio composer Giovanni Francesco Anerio (*Il Teatro Armonico Spirituale*, Rome, 1619). These composers were comparatively respectful of the eloquently simple prose of the Latin Vulgate Bible, adding dialog or other elaborative text only sparingly. Except for the lovely opening sentence — which sets the scene, as it were — and the final "artless but devout song" of the shepherds, Charpentier's text is quite faithful to Luke 2:8-16.

The carollike song of the shepherds (Nos. 8 and 9), their excited and rapturous chorus on departing for Bethlehem (No. 4), and the pointed omission from the little oratorio of St. Luke's "multitude of the heavenly host" emphasize the pastoral elements of the Christmas story. And in this emphasis Charpentier was working within a tradition more French than Italianate: we are reminded of the charming noels, or Christmas carols, so popular in 17th-century France (to Charpentier himself is attributed the melody of "Bring a Torch, Jeanette Isabella"), and of the pastoral scenes in French song and lyric drama from the time of the Renaissance.


Italianate is the air of the angel (No. 3), with its *bel canto* melody and its ritornells for two violins; Italianate also are the recitatives of the Narrator, now sung by one voice, now by two, in the manner of Carissimi. And the writing of the first shepherds' chorus (No. 4) derives from the *stile antico*, the contrapuntal choral style mastered in Rome by Charpentier.




On the other hand, the gay minuets of the prelude and the postlude, the *rondeau* structures of the march and the first shepherds' chorus, the binary forms, dance rhythms, and solo-chorus repetitions of the shepherds' air (Nos. 7 and 8) are drawn from French sources, as is the general atmosphere of childlike sweetness and simplicity that pervades the whole work.





When was *Song of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ* composed? We cannot say precisely; the manuscript is not dated, and the work was not published. But we do know that it was written for the private chapel of Mademoiselle de Guise, since the names of her singers appear in the autograph. Charpentier is said to have been employed by the Duchesse de Guise immediately upon his return from study in Rome, in the mid-1650's. Since she died in 1688, we can be certain that *In Nativitatem D. N. J. C. Canticum* was composed between about 1655 and 1688.

### THE EDITION

The present edition is based on the composer's holograph (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Rés. Vm<sup>1</sup> 259, vol. 6, folios 89—96), which is the unique source. The work is here published for the first time.

Additions to Charpentier's manuscript are indicated in square brackets. The English translation has been added; this has necessitated some rhythmic alterations in vocal parts, but the composer's original rhythms for the Latin text are clearly distinguishable. Any other alterations of the original are cited in footnotes, except for modernizations of notation that do not actually alter the music (e. g., substitution of  for the

composer's ; use of the  sign to cancel a sharp, instead of the composer's ; reduction of clefs from the original French violin, soprano, mezzo-soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone clefs to their more commonly used modern equivalents).

Note values and meters are as they appear in the manuscript, with the exception of , with its archaic note shapes  and , which has been reduced to  and the note shapes modernized accordingly (see measure 246 ff.).

Tempos, dynamics, and realizations of the ornaments and the *basso continuo* have been suggested by the editor in terms of 17th-century musical practice in Italy and France.

Although originally scored for two violins and continuo, the work may be performed with flutes or oboes as substitutes for the violins.

The editor expresses his appreciation to Professor David Strickler of Albion College, who assisted with the English translation, and to Professor Maynard Klein of the University of Michigan, who conducted the work in its first modern performance in the Latin version and who encouraged its publication.

H. WILEY HITCHCOCK  
University of Michigan  
February 19, 1959

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# Song of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ

In Nativitatem D. N. J. C. Canticum

[1.] *Praeludium*

Luke 2:8-16

MARC-ANTOINE CHARPENTIER

Edited by H. Wiley Hitchcock

[Allegro moderato, ♩ = 90-100]

Violin I

Violin II

Basso Continuo\*\*  
(organ, cello)

V. I

V. II

B.C.

5

9

V. I

V. II

B.C.

10

\*Original Key: A. \*\*The figured-bass part has been realized by the editor. The organ bass should be doubled by cello—one or more, depending on the number of violins used in performance.

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## [2.] Récit de l'historien \*

30 [Andante, ♩ = 60-80]

Soprano I solo

*p*

[*mp*] Fri - gi - dae noc - tis um - bra to - tum or - bem te -  
The shade — of the i - cy night — cov - ered all — the

Soprano II solo

[Andante, ♩ = 60-80]

Basso continuo  
[Cello tacet]

9  
7  
#4

35

S. I

ge - bat, et im - mer - si ia - ce - bant om - nes in som - no pro - fun -  
earth — and — plunged ev - 'ry - one — in - to — a deep —

S. II

B.C.

8  
5  
3

6

7 #6  
#3 4

5  
4 3

S. I

do. Pa - sto - res au - tem Iu - de - ae vi - gi - la -  
sleep. And the shep - herds of Ju - de - a kept watch —

S. II

B.C.

97-6307

\*Recitative of Evangelist

## [3. Air of the Angel]

[Allegro cantabile, ♩ = 120]

55

Violin I

Violin II

Soprano solo

Angelus [*mf*]

No - li - te ti - me - re, pa - sto - res;  
Fear not, — fear not, — O shep - herds;

Basso continuo

[Allegro cantabile, ♩ = 120]

[*mf*]

7 6

60

V. I

V. II

S.

no - li - te ti - me - re, pa -  
fear not, — fear not, — O

B.C.

65

V. I

V. II

S.

sto - res; no - li - te, no - li - te ti - me - re;  
shep - herds; fear not, — oh, fear not, ye shep - herds;

B.C.

## [4. Chorus of Shepherds]

[Moderato,  $\text{♩} = 60-70$ ]

(150)

Violin I

Violin II

Sopranos I [Solo]

*lum.*  
Him.

Sopranos II

Altos I

Altos II\* [*f*]

Sur - ga - mus, fe - sti - ne - mus, e -  
A - rise now, let us has - ten to

Tenors [*f*]

Sur - ga - mus, fe - sti - ne - mus, e -  
A - rise now, let us has - ten to

Basses [*f*]

Pro - pe - re - mus, e - a -  
Let us has - ten to go, —

[Moderato,  $\text{♩} = 60-70$ ]

Basso continuo [*f*]

\*The part here written for Altos II should theoretically be sung by male voices, i.e., countertenors. A few high tenors should join the altos if possible.

[5.] Marche

Violin I *[mf]* 205

Violin II *[mf]*

Basso continuo *[mf]*

5

V. I 210 *[Fine]*

V. II *[Fine]*

B.C. *[Fine]*

5

V. I *[p]*

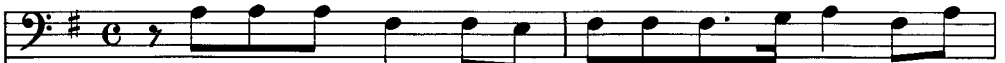
V. II *[p]*

B.C. *[p]*

97-6307 6

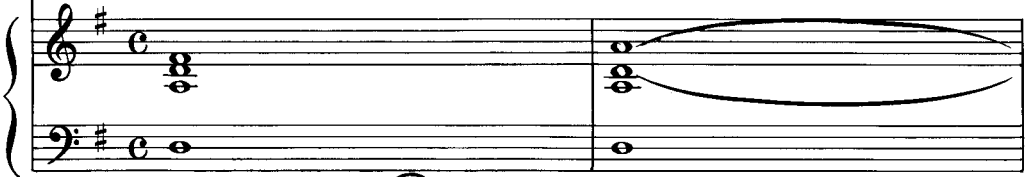
[Andante, ♩ = 60-80]

Baritone solo



E - un - tes au - tem pa - sto - res per - ve - ne - runt ad  
A - non these same hum - ble shep - herds did ar - rive at the

Basso continuo



[Cello tacet to 246]

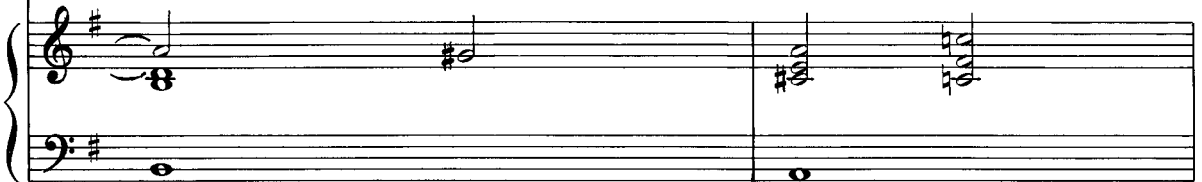
240

Barit.



lo - cum u - bi pu - er na - tus e - rat, et in - tran - tes  
place where - in the Child — had been born. — And when they were

B.C.



7

#6

5

#6  
b

Barit.



do - mum in - ve - ne - runt Ma - ri - am et Io - seph et —  
come in - to the house, they saw Ma - ry and Jo - seph, and the

B.C.



Barit.



pu - e - rum in - vo - lu - tum pan - nis et re - cli - na - tum in prae - se - pi -  
Child wrapped in — swad - dling clothes and — ly - ing — in a man -

B.C.



260 [Allegro cantabile e semplice]

Soprano I  
solo

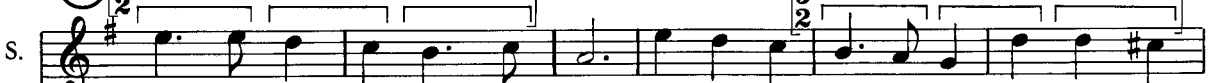


\* [1.] Sal - ve, pu - e - ru - le, Sal - ve, te - nel - lu - le, O na - te  
[1.] Hail, ti - ny Lord - ling! Hail, ten - der - new-born King! Now all cre -

Basso  
continuo



265



par - vu - le, Quam bo - nus es; O na - te par - vu - le, Quam bo - nus  
a - tion sing Thy praise and worth; Now all cre - a - tion sing Thy praise and

B.C.



276

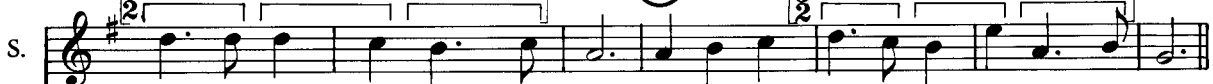


es! Tu coe - lum de - se - ris, Tu mun - do na - sce - ris, No - bis te'ut  
worth! Thou heav - en dost de - sert And in this hum - ble birth Com - est to

B.C.



280



mi - se - ris As - si - mi - les; No - bis te'ut mi - se - ris As - si - mi - les.\*\*  
men on earth Our sins to bear; Com - est to men on earth Our sins to bear.

B.C.



\*Texts of verses 2 and 3 will be found on page 47.

\*\*Composer's note in the Ms.: "Suivez au choeur sans interruption" (Go on immediately to the chorus).

## [8. Chorus of Shepherds]

[Allegro moderato, ♩ = 120]

(285)

*[f]*

Violin I

Violin II

Sopranos I

[1.] *Sal - ve pu - e - ru - le, Sal - ve te - nel - lu - le,*  
 [1.] Hail, ti - ny Lord - ling! Hail, ten - der new - born King!  
 [3.] Boy of the Vir - gin mild, Bless - ed and un - de - filed,

Sopranos II

*[f]*

Altos

[1.] *Sal - ve pu - e - ru - le, Sal - ve te - nel - lu - le,*  
 [1.] Hail, ti - ny Lord - ling! Hail, ten - der new - born King!  
 [3.] Boy of the Vir - gin mild, Bless - ed and un - de - filed,

Tenors

*[f]*

Basses

[1.] *Sal - ve pu - e - ru - le, Sal - ve te - nel - lu - le,*  
 [1.] Hail, ti - ny Lord - ling! Hail, ten - der new - born King!  
 [3.] Boy of the Vir - gin mild, Bless - ed and un - de - filed,

[Allegro moderato, ♩ = 120]

Basso continuo

*[f]*

\*The chorus sings verses 1 and 3 after they are sung, respectively, by the soloists. Verse 2 is not sung by the chorus. The texts of verses 2 and 3 will be found on page 47.

[L'istesso tempo]

Violin I

Violin II

Basso continuo

310

V. I

V. II

B.C.

315

V. I

V. II

B.C.

\*