

King Solomon's Singers



Sacred and Profane Love:
Polyphony and Chant
on Song of Songs Texts

Friday, August 6, 2010

7:30 PM

Bond Chapel

**SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE:
POLYPHONY AND CHANT ON SONG OF SONGS TEXTS**

Ego flos campi	Jacobus Clemens non Papa (ca. 1510–68)
Quam pulchra es Quam pulchra es	Plainchant (<i>Newberry Processionale</i> , ca. 1300) John Dunstable (ca. 1380–1453)
Tota pulchra es	Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450–1517)
Anima mea liquefacta est	Martín de Rivaflacha (ca. 1479–1528)
Trahe nos Virgo Trahe me post te	Plainchant (<i>Liber Usualis</i>) Francisco Guerrero (1527–99)
Vox dilecti Dilectus meus mihi Guttur tuum sicut vinum optimum	Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525–94)
Quae est ista Descendi in hortum meum	Plainchant (<i>Liber Usualis</i>) Cipriano de Rore (1515–65)

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

“The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.” So begins the book of the Hebrew Bible that most beguiled composers of sacred Renaissance polyphony. It is perhaps not surprising that so much music would be set to texts from a book explicitly titled “Songs,” but the musical title is not the only reason for its appeal. For Renaissance composers, who were predominantly employed as church choirmasters and who themselves were often very devout Christians, there were few outlets for the expression of love towards anyone but their Christian god. The Song of Songs, unlike any other book in the Old or New Testament, is quite clearly a collection of secular love poetry. Of course, it has been interpreted variously as an expression of longing for the coming Christ, of devotion to the Virgin Mary, and of God’s love for his people, but it seems difficult to argue in our age that the original author or authors of the text had purely sacred subjects in mind. The composers of the Renaissance and the even earlier composers of plainchant melodies must have been aware of the tension between the often erotic, even explicitly anatomical imagery in the poetry of the Song of Songs and the holy subjects to which they directed their settings of these texts. Indeed, the music that they composed for these texts is generally more emotional, more direct, and more florid than their settings of other sacred texts. The only examples of sacred polyphony that approach Song of Songs settings for sensuality and emotional urgency are settings of Marian texts—and these two genres are often blended, as the Virgin takes the place of the mortal beloved as the subject of praise.

Our program begins with one of the finest examples of the genre, Jacobus Clemens non Papa’s setting of *Ego flos campi* (I am the rose of Sharon). Clemens was of the generation of Flemish composers immediately following Josquin, and he demonstrated mastery of all the various forms of Renaissance choral writing—from his vernacular settings of the Psalms (*Die Souterliedekens*) and homophonic chansons to his challenging and still controversial “secret chromatic art” motets. *Ego flos campi* belongs to Clemens’s more diatonic style of composition; indeed, there is not a single chromatic note indicated in the manuscript. This imparts a serene beauty to the composition, but Clemens also manages to give shape and contrast to the piece without major harmonic shifts, particularly through the introduction of clearly offset homophonic passages. The most prominent of these declaims the text “Sicut lilium inter spinas” (as a lily among thorns), which was the motto

of the Marian Brotherhood of s'Hertogenbosch in whose employ Clemens spent five years and to whom this motet is dedicated.

Quam pulchra es (How fair art thou) is one of the most commonly set texts in the Song of Songs, and understandably so. The chapter from which it is drawn is devoted almost entirely to a litany of compliments to female beauty, some quite explicit. We perform two settings of verses from chapter 7, one plainchant (from a manuscript at the Newberry Library) and one by the English composer John Dunstable, both transcribed and edited by Calvin Bower. The anonymous composer of the chant setting captures the shape and feeling of the text beautifully, both within individual phrases and over the full sweep of the piece. Dunstable, the most famous of the pre-Eton-Choirbook English composers known for sweet, consonant harmonies, shows a similar skill in phrasing and feel for the poetry in his setting. If either composer saw any incongruity in closing his piece with the text “Ibi dabo tibi ubera mea. Alleluia.” (There I will give you my breasts.¹ Alleluia.), it is not apparent in the music.

A similarly popular text for Renaissance composers (and presumably for similar reasons) is *Tota pulchra es* (Thou art all fair), of which we sing the setting by the Flemish composer Heinrich Isaac. Isaac was a contemporary of Josquin and is best known for his song *Innsbruck, ich muß dich lassen*, but his achievements in sacred music are formidable, including over 300 polyphonic settings of the Propers of the Mass. In *Tota pulchra es*, Isaac establishes a mysterious, shifting harmonic background, against which he sets bright, almost ecstatic individual lines, often spanning over an octave. The larger shape of the piece is a series of long, slow builds toward cadences that are inevitably interrupted before they fully resolve. The tension reaches its maximum at “Surge, propera” (Arise, come away) and is finally released on the words “amica mea” (my love), with a final denouement on the text “Veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis” (Come with me from Lebanon, come, thou shalt be crowned).

We make a (regrettably brief) detour into the Spanish Renaissance with settings by one rather obscure composer (Martín de Rivaflécha) and one of the Spanish greats (Francisco Guerrero). Rivaflécha was of the same generation of Isaac at a time when the Low Countries were under Spanish rule, and there was strong mutual influence between Flemish and Spanish composers. His setting of the heartbreaking text “Anima mea liquefacta est (ut dilectus locutus est)” (My soul failed [when my beloved spake]) is simple, short, and effective. Guerrero was second only to Tomás Luis de Victoria among Spanish composers of the High Renaissance and was known as *El Cantor de Maria* for his skill in composing motets in praise of the Virgin. It is fitting, then, that the Guerrero motet we present tonight is the only one on the program that makes the Marian connection explicitly. Where the Song of Songs texts has “Trahe me post te” (Draw me after you), Guerrero adds “Virgo Maria” as the specific addressee. Guerrero also makes the interesting decision to include the rather explicit body imagery of the “quam pulchra” text (including two different similes for the subject’s breasts), but as with Dunstable and our earlier anonymous chant composer, this juxtaposition of spirit and flesh does not seem to cause Guerrero the level of anxiety we might expect. The use of the “Trahe” text as a Marian hymn was apparently popular enough that it appears in the *Liber Usualis* as a Vespers antiphon for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. We sing this antiphon immediately before the Guerrero motet.

Any discussion of Renaissance settings of Song of Songs texts would be incomplete without a mention of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina. Probably the most famous of all composers of Renaissance polyphony, Palestrina devoted an entire book of 29 motets to his Song of Songs settings and dedicated the 1584 publication to Pope Gregory XIII. In his dedication, Palestrina expressed shame at having previously published madrigals and secular songs; however, both the subject matter and style of the Song of Songs motets have a great deal in common with Palestrina’s more worldly compositions. We perform three of Palestrina’s motets, the first of which, *Vox dilecti* (The voice of my beloved), is one of the more lively compositions on the program. With madrigalian word-painting, Palestrina sets the voices running and leaping

¹ In this particular instance—though they often use the more literal equivalent—the translators of the King James Version chose to use the more circumspect “There I will give you my loves.”

with the “young hart...skipping upon the hills” that is the poet’s beloved. The second selection, *Dilectus meus mihi* (My beloved is mine), begins with a simple, sweet declaration of mutual devotion but moves through imagery similar to the previous motet (“be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether”) and ends with the text of loss and anxiety we encountered in the work of Rivaflacha (“I sought him, but I found him not”). The last Palestrina motet demonstrates one interesting consequence of setting nearly the entire book of the Song of Songs, namely that some of the poetry does not quite measure up (at least in modern translation). *Guttur tuum sicut vinum optimum* (“The roof of your mouth [is] like the best wine”), while not the strangest verse in the Song of Songs (“How beautiful are thy feet with shoes” is a strong contender), is also not the most immediately affecting. Palestrina nevertheless manages to make a lovely piece of music from it, indeed one of the most successful in the entire cycle.

We conclude with one more selection of plainchant and Cipriano de Rore’s setting of *Descendi in hortum meum* (I went down to my garden). The plainchant (again from the Liber Usualis) sets the verse immediately preceding “Descendi,” the famous “Quae est ista, quae ascendit?” (Who is she that cometh up?). The imposing, almost fearsome imagery and music in this chant provide an interesting contrast to the sweet, wistful nature of De Rore’s motet. De Rore unites the Flemish and Italian themes in this program; he was born in Flanders but spent his most productive years as *maestro di cappella* under Duke Ercole II d’Este in Ferrara. De Rore is most widely remembered for his innovations as a composer of madrigals, but the piece we present demonstrates his ample skill at sacred polyphony. This seven-voice motet is constructed as a three-voice canon accompanied by freely composed four-part counterpoint. At no time, however, are the mathematical constraints of this puzzle apparent in the flow of harmony or text. There is a clear feeling of melancholy and loss in this work, made explicit in the text of the second half, which implores: “Revertere, Sunamitis, revertere ut intueamur te” (Return, O Shulamite, return, that we may look upon thee).

— Tom Crawford, August 2010

References: Howard Mayer Brown, *Music in the Renaissance*, Prentice Hall, 1976; David Mason Greene, *Greene’s Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers*, Doubleday & Co., 1985; Grove Music Online; Sally Dunkley and Francis Steele, eds., *Musica Dei Donum* Series, Oxford, 2007.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

(ALL TEXTS ARE FROM THE BIBLIA SACRA VULGATA;
ALL TRANSLATIONS ARE FROM THE KING JAMES BIBLE.)

Jacobus Clemens non Papa: *Ego flos campi*

(Canticum Canticorum 2:1–2; 4:15)

Ego flos campi et lilium convalium,
Sicut lilium inter spinas,
Sic amica mea inter filias.

Fons hortorum,
Et puteus aquarum viventium,
Quae fluunt impetu de Libano.

(Song of Songs 2:1–2; 4:15)

I am a rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.
As the lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.

A fountain of gardens,
A well of living waters,
And streams from Lebanon.

Plainchant and John Dunstable: *Quam pulchra es*

(Canticum Canticorum 7:4–12)

Quam pulchra es et quam decora,
Carissima in deliciis.

Statura tua assimilata est palmae
Et ubera tua botris.

Caput tuum ut Carmelus,

Collum tuum sicut turris eburnea.

Veni, dilecte mi,
Egrediamur in agrum,

Videamus si florent fructus parturiunt,
Si floruerunt mala Punica.
Ibi dabo tibi ubera mea.

(Song of Songs 7:4–12)

How fair and how pleasant art thou,
O love, for delights!

This thy stature is like to a palm tree,
And thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

Thine head upon thee is like Carmel.

Thy neck is as a tower of ivory.

Come, my beloved,
Let us go forth into the field.

Let us see whether the tender grape appear,
And the pomegranates bud forth:
There I will give thee my loves.

Heinrich Isaac: *Tota pulchra es*

(Canticum Canticorum 4:7–11; 2:11–12)

Tota pulchra es amica mea,
Et macula non est in te.

Favus distillans labia tua;
Mel et lac sub lingua tua.

Odor unguentorum tuorum
Super omnia aromata.

Iam enim hiems transiit,
Imber abiit et recessit.

Flores apparuerunt,
Vinae florentes odorem dederunt.
Et vox turturis audita est in terra nostra.

Surge, propera, amica mea.

Veni de Libano
Veni, coronaberis.

(Song of Songs 4:7–11; 2:11–12)

Thou art all fair, my love;
There is no spot in thee.

Thy lips drop as the honeycomb:
Honey and milk are under thy tongue.

The smell of thine ointments
Is better than all spices.

Lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;

The flowers appear,
The vines with the tender grape give a good smell,
And the voice of the turtle [dove] is heard in our land.

Rise up, my love, my fair one.

Come with me from Lebanon.
[Come, thou shalt be crowned.]

Martín de Rivaflecha: *Anima mea liquefacta est*

(Canticum Canticorum 5:6–8)

Anima mea liquefacta est
Ut dilectus locutus est.
Quaesivi et non inveni illum;
Vocavi et non respondit mihi.

Adjuro vos, filiae Jerusalem:
Si inveneritis dilectum meum
Ut nuntietis eum quia amore langueo.

(Song of Songs 5:6–8)

My soul failed when my beloved spake:
I sought him, but I could not find him;
I called him, but he gave me no answer.

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If ye find my beloved,
That ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

Plainchant and Francisco Guerrero: *Trabe nos Virgo / Trabe me post te*

(Canticum Canticorum 1:3; 4:10; 7:4–8)

[*Plainchant*]
Trahe [nos Virgo immaculata],
Post te curremus
[In] odor[em] unguentorum tuorum.

[*Motet*]
Trahe me post te, [Virgo Maria,] curremus
[In] odor[em] unguentorum tuorum.

Quam pulchra es et quam decora,
Carissima in deliciis.

Statura tua assimilata est palmae
Et ubera tua botris.

Dixi: ascendam in palmam
Et apprehendam fructum eius
Et erunt ubera tua sicut botri vineae
Et odor oris tui sicut odor malorum.

(Song of Songs 1:3; 4:10; 7:4–8)

[*Plainchant*]
Draw [us, immaculate Virgin],
We will run after thee,
[Towards] the smell of thine ointments.

[*Motet*]
Draw me, [Virgin Mary], we will run after thee,
[Towards] the smell of thine ointments.

How fair and how pleasant art thou,
O love, for delights!

This thy stature is like to a palm tree,
And thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

I said, I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of the boughs thereof:
Now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine,
And the smell of thy nose like apples.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina: *Vox dilecti, Dilectus meus mihi, Guttur tuum sicut vinum optimum*

(Canticum Canticorum 2:8–10)

Vox dilecti mei.
Ecce iste venit saliens montibus,
Transiliens colles.

Similis est dilectus meus caprae,
Hinuloque cervorum.
En ipse stat post parietem nostrum,
Despiciens per fenestras,
Prospiciens per cancellos.

En dilectus meus loquitur mihi.

(Song of Songs 2:8–10)

The voice of my beloved!
Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.

My beloved is like a roe or a young hart:
Behold, he standeth behind our wall,
He looketh forth at the windows,
Shewing himself through the lattice.

My beloved [speaks].

(Canticum Canticorum 2:16–17; 3:1)

Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi
Qui pascitur inter lilia.

Donec adspiret dies
Et inclinentur umbrae,
Revertere similis esto dilecte mi capreae
Hinulo cervorum super montes Bether

In lectulo meo per noctes quaesivi,
Quem diligit anima mea:
Quaesivi illum, et non inveni.

(Song of Songs 2:16–17; 3:1)

My beloved is mine, and I am his:
He feedeth among the lilies.

Until the day break,
And the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe
Or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

By night on my bed I sought him
Whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, but I found him not.

(Canticum Canticorum 7:9–10)

Guttur tuum sicut vinum optimum,
Dignum dilecto meo ad potandum,
Labisque et dentibus illius ruminandum

Ego dilecto meo
Et ad me conversio eius.

(Song of Songs 7:9–10)

The roof of thy mouth like the best wine,
For my beloved, that goeth down sweetly,
Causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.

I am my beloved's,
And his desire is toward me.

Plainchant: *Quae est ista*

(Canticum Canticorum 6:9)

Quae est ista quae [ascendit],
[Quasi] aurora consurgens,
Pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol
Terribilis ut [castrorum] acies ordinata?

(Song of Songs 6:10)

Who is she that [cometh up] as the morning,
Fair as the moon, clear as the sun,
And terrible as an army with banners?

Cipriano de Rore: *Descendi in hortum meum*

(Canticum Canticorum 6:10–12)

Descendi [in] hortum [meum]
Ut viderem poma convallium,
Et inspicerem si florisset vinea
Et germinassent mala punica.

Revertere, revertere Sunamitis,
Revertere ut intueamur te.

(Song of Songs 6:11–13)

I went down into [my] garden
To see the fruits of the valley,
And to see whether the vine flourished
And the pomegranates budded.

Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, that we may look upon thee.

PERFORMERS

Heather Ahrenholz
Will Bouvel
Michael Byrley

William Chin
Tom Crawford
Matthew Dean

Tamara Ghattas
Amy Mantrone
Jessica Melger

Peter Olson
Benjamin Rivera
Stephanie Sheffield

ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE

And the servants also of Hiram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought alnum trees and precious stones. And the king made of the alnum trees terraces to the house of the LORD, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers; and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah. (2 Chronicles 9:10–11)

King Solomon's Singers is a newly formed ensemble dedicated to the performance of Renaissance polyphony and chant. The members of the ensemble are professional and semi-professional singers from the Chicago area—members of ensembles such as Chicago Chorale, Schola Antiqua of Chicago, The Oriana Singers, The Chicago Early Music Consort, and Chicago a cappella—who share a love of this particular repertoire. This is the ensemble's debut concert, and we hope to bring you more of this beautiful music in the future. For more information, e-mail us at king.solomons.singers@gmail.com or visit us on Facebook.

SPECIAL THANKS

King Solomon's Singers wish to thank the following people for their kind efforts towards making this concert happen: Jenei Grigg and Chicago Theological Seminary for providing rehearsal space; Calvin Bower for permission to use his personal editions of the chant and Dunstable settings of *Quam pulchra es*; and Cathryn Crawford for logistical assistance and moral support.